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CONTROLLING HISTORY
HOW THE HUMBLE JOYSTICK KEEPS ON EVOLVING

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Your definitive guide to Sir Arthur's ghoulish adventures

BACK TO THE 90s

IN THE CHAIR WITH… DAVID BRABEN

THE NEW ZEALAND STORY

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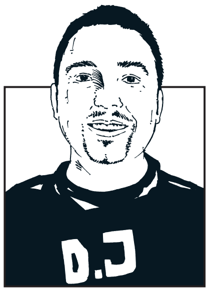
THE MAKING OF… SPY VS SPY

ISSUE 74 £4.99 NOWGamer.com
IMAGINE PUBLISHING

RETRO GAMER* LOAD 74

THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE JOYSTICK?



DARRAN JONES

It's the Japanese Sega Saturn pad for me. It feels great in the hands and is perfect for shmups and beat-'em-ups. When it comes to older sticks, it's the Cruiser all the time.

Expertise:
Juggling a wife, two beautiful girls and **Retro Gamer**

Currently playing:
Drop 7 (iPhone)

Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT

For me, pad-wise, it has to be the Japanese Saturn pad, as it's peerless when it comes to brawlers. Joysticks, I'd say the Konix Speed King for its great, sturdy and wonderfully comfortable design.

Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them

Currently playing:
BioShock 2

Favourite game of all time:
BioShock 2



JASON KELK

The Zipstick; bright yellow buttons, built like a tank and still working after 25 years!

Expertise:
Self-induced headaches

Currently playing:
Galaga Legions (XBLA)

Favourite game of all time:
Io



CRAIG GRANNELL

It was pricey at the time, but the Euromax Professional Plus – also known as the Zipstick – was king of joysticks and still is, nudging ahead of the Competition Pro, Arcade and Cruiser.

Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control

Currently playing:
Mini Squadron (iPhone)

Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



PAUL DRURY

The iconic Atari joystick. I destroyed one during a *Decathlon* session and my mate Pete took out the PCB and we button-mashed directly onto the pressure pads. Turns out there was a future in that idea…

Expertise:
Plonking

Currently playing:
Blaster

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



DAVID CROOKES

The one that came with my CPC, if only because it was so laughably flimsy that it barely lasted a *Daley Thompson* session. For class, the Competition Pro.

Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation

Currently playing:
Canabalt (iPhone)

Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



MARTYN CARROLL

I think the DualShock pad is skill. It's so good that Sony didn't need to significantly update its design for the PS2 or PS3 – bar that Sixaxis nonsense, obviously.

Expertise:
8-bits and bobs

Currently playing:
Battlefield: Bad Company 2

Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



JOHN SZCZEPANIAK

A Sega Saturn USB pad, since it combines the best digital controller ever made with PC and PS3 functionality.

Expertise:
Japan

Currently playing:
Mahjong

Favourite game of all time:
Valkyria Chronicles



IAIN LEE

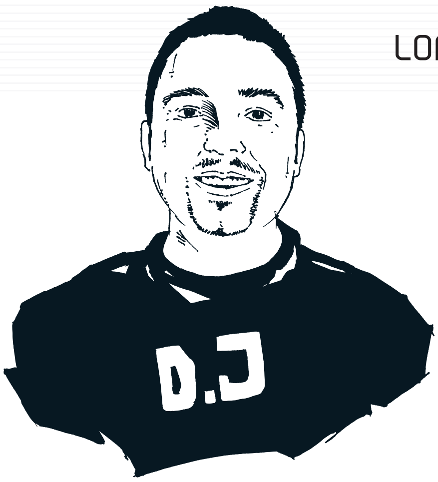
Kempston. Great name, great stick. Chunky and sturdy

Expertise:
Japan

Currently playing:
Simon

Favourite game of all time:
Elite (BBC Model B)

LOADING...



If last month's *Simon* feature proved one thing, it's that every *Retro Gamer* reader has their own idea of what should and shouldn't be in the magazine. Some love the inclusion of a historic piece on electronic gaming, while others felt that it had no business being in the magazine because it's not a 'proper' videogame.

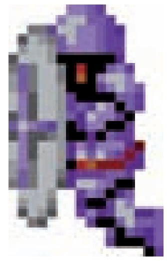
Nevertheless, it sparked some healthy debate, ensured that plenty of new topics appeared on the forums, and once again confirmed why I love working on a magazine like **Retro Gamer**. Our readership has a passion – some might even say obsession – for their hobby that I just don't see in other gaming mags, and while it occasionally frustrates me when we end up going around in circles over the same old topics, it also reminds me that we're dealing with a group of people who love **Retro Gamer** as much as I do.

With that in mind, we've stuffed this issue with all sorts of fascinating content, ranging from a complete evolutionary look at the humble joypad to a massive interview with *Elite* co-creator David Braben and a long overdue examination of the SAM Coupé.

Enjoy the magazine,



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» **Load 74** Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED

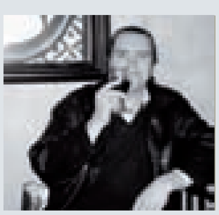
RETRO REVIVALS

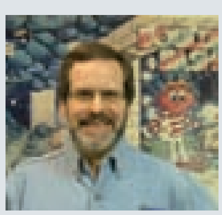


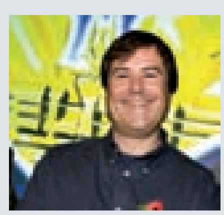




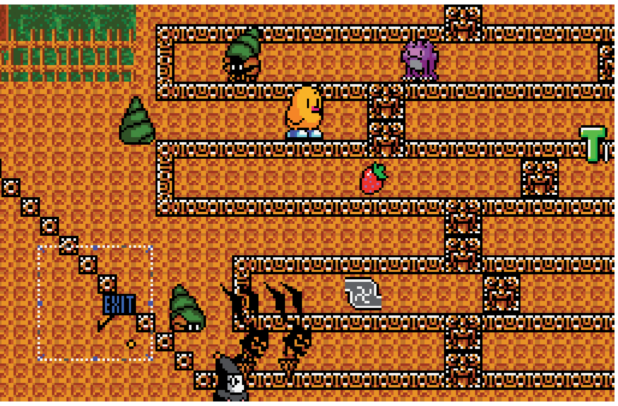
In the hot seat this month...







"Still holds bags of charm and appeal today" Stuart Hunt

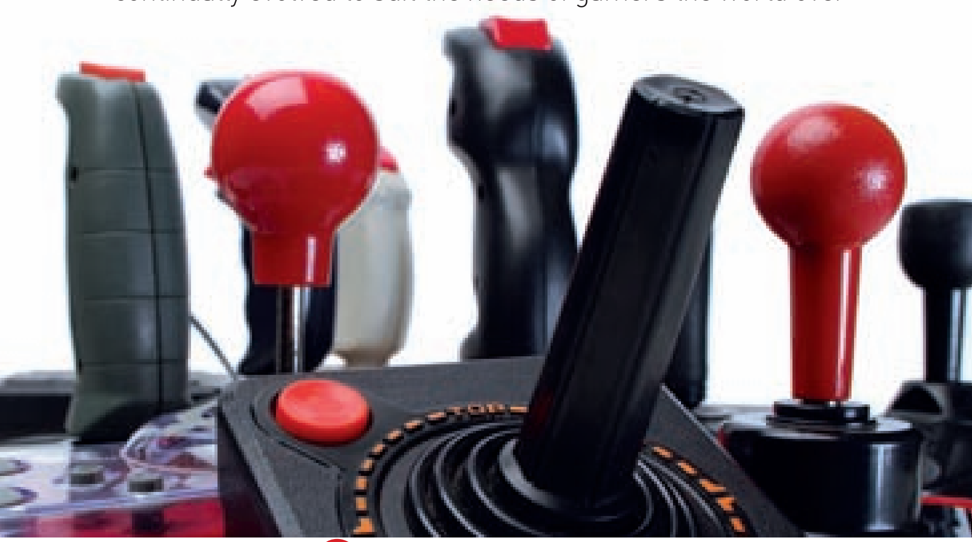


70 Classic Game

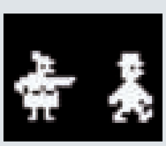
Kiwis very rarely get to star in videogames, so be sure to check out Tiki's adventure in Taito's excellent *The New Zealand Story*

54 JOYSTICK EVOLUTION

Retro Gamer looks at the humble joystick and how it's continually evolved to suit the needs of gamers the world over



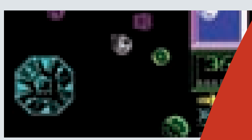
retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL



22 I, BALL

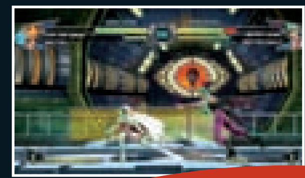
Spectrum fan Andrew Masters professes his love for Firebird's excellent scolling shoot-'em-up *I, Ball*





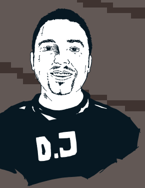
ESSENTIALS

RETRO RATED



retro radar

» GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD

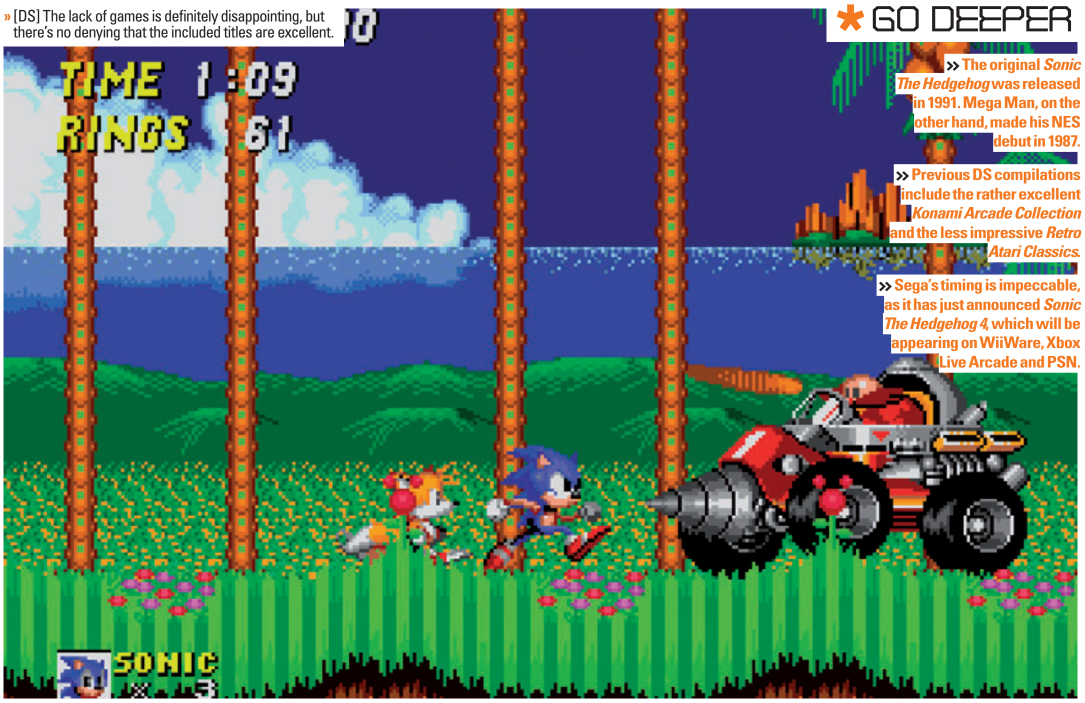


» We sift through another month of announcements and reveals to bring you the latest news from the retro scene. It's a Sega special this month thanks to the return of Sonic and Sega's recent plans for its Shenmue franchise

✱ CONTENTS



» [DS] The lack of games is definitely disappointing, but there's no denying that the included titles are excellent.



✱ GO DEEPER

» The original *Sonic The Hedgehog* was released in 1991. Mega Man, on the other hand, made his NES debut in 1987.

» Previous DS compilations include the rather excellent *Konami Arcade Collection* and the less impressive *Retro Atari Classics*.

» Sega's timing is impeccable, as it has just announced *Sonic The Hedgehog 4*, which will be appearing on WiiWare, Xbox Live Arcade and PSN.

CON-PILATIONS?

ARE THE NEW COMPILATIONS FROM CAPCOM AND SEGA FULL OF RETRO GOODNESS OR SIMPLY LACKING GAMES? RETRO GAMER INVESTIGATES...

Go back just four short years and there were plenty of decent compilations to get excited about, with the PSP in particular creaking under their weight. Now, though, the shift and popularity of downloadable content has seen this once handy resource for retro gamers dry up, and while we still get gems like Sega's *Ultimate Mega Drive Collection*, they're happening with far less frequency than we'd like.

It's with mixed relief, then, that two new compilations will be heading to Nintendo's DS. The first, *Sonic Classic Collection*, has already been touched on in a past issue, while the second is a brand new *Mega Man* compilation from Capcom. As exciting as this news is – after all, the DS is perfect for playing retro games on the go – these new compendiums aren't quite as comprehensive or as awe-inspiring as we were expecting.

Take the *Sonic* collection, for example. Just four games are included for your hard-earned cash: *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*, *Sonic The Hedgehog 3*, and *Sonic & Knuckles*, which will include the lock-on features that weren't available in the *Ultimate Mega Drive Collection*. Great games, we're sure you'll agree, but considering the size of a DS cartridge, four titles, no matter how good they are, feels a little on the tight side. After all, the *Sega Mega Drive Collection* on the PSP may not have included *Sonic & Knuckles*, but it did include 26 other games, not to mention several arcade games. Granted, UMD has more space, but it shouldn't matter when it comes to emulating tiny Mega Drive games.

Capcom's incoming *Mega Man* release is shaping up to be a polished little collection, but we were expecting far more from it. Rather than include any of the games that appeared on the *Mega Man Anniversary* and *Mega Man X* collections, Capcom is instead releasing its four *Mega Man Zero* games that were first released on the Game Boy Advance on one single compilation instead.

Now again, this is great news, but surely it would have made more sense to start off with the original games?

> "As exciting as the news is, these compendiums aren't as comprehensive as we expected"

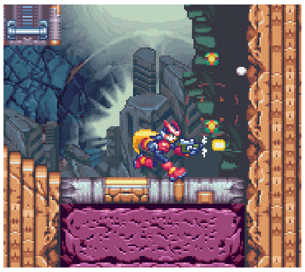
Unfortunately, no one at Capcom was able to offer any comments as to why the four *Zero* games were chosen over earlier titles, so we may never know the full answer. Now admittedly, Game Boy Advance games are a fair size larger than titles from earlier systems, so we can totally understand why Capcom has only included the four games, especially as it likes to separate the *Mega Man, X, Zero*

How the two compilations stack up



Sonic Classic Collection

Sega's latest *Sonic* collection contains easily his best 2D outings to date – although fans of the excellent *Sonic CD* will beg to differ. All three *Sonic* Mega Drive games have made the cut, including *Sonic & Knuckles*, which, unlike Sega's last compilation, will link up with the other games as the original did. Sega has been surprisingly quiet about the inclusion of additional games, but considering how many previous *Sonic* compilations have been released with extra titles, we're hoping that at least a couple more games get included, even if it is the likes of *Sonic Spinball*. Still, with all four games already available on Xbox Live Arcade and the Wii's Virtual Console, it remains to be seen how many people will be prepared to pick up *Sonic*'s latest collection.



Mega Man Zero Collection

To be fair on Capcom, this is the collection that represents better value for money in our mind. While it's an obvious disappointment that *Mega Man*'s NES adventures haven't been included, you are getting four pretty big games for your money. Granted, they're not quite the classics of those found on Sega's new compilation, but all four games are well-regarded on the Game Boy and now fetch a fair price on eBay. Unlike the *Sonic* games, the *Mega Man Zero* titles haven't been released on anything since making their GBA debut, so this compilation will be a great way of catching up for those that are unfamiliar with the series. Again, there's been no news from Capcom as to whether any additional extras will be included, so be sure to stay tuned for a review of both games.



» [DS] It will cost a pretty penny to track down all four *Mega Man Zero* games, so this compilation represents good value.





and *Transmission* franchises, but it does seem like a massive oversight to not include the earlier games, and therefore offer better value for money by delivering a compilation that features more titles on it.

As with all videogames, these new collections need to make money and be successful, and sales of both the *Mega Man Anniversary* and *Mega Man X* collections for the GameCube and PS2 were hardly stellar. Then there are services like Xbox Live Arcade, PlayStation Network and WiiWare to consider. *Mega Man 9* was a big success for Capcom, so it should come as no surprise to learn that a tenth game is well under way. Many *Mega Man* games are already available on the Virtual Console, so it's quite possible that Capcom simply feels that the service is a far more viable and cost-effective way of allowing gamers to relive the old classics.

The case with Sega's *Sonic* compilation is a little more interesting, as the games themselves are actually being ported, rather than emulated, to the machine so that you can stop play by simply closing the DS like any other DS title. Even taking into account this, though, it still doesn't explain why so few games are available. It smacks of Sega wanting a second bite of the cherry with a second compilation, and while that makes solid business sense, it will matter little to those fans who have already purchased the games several times before.

"*Sonic Classic Collection* is being released on the DS as it's the current number one selling handheld console with a target market that's perfect for the title," reveals James Bray, Sega UK's brand manager. "*Sonic 1-3* and *Sonic & Knuckles* were chosen for the compilation to offer the complete original story from the Mega Drive era. There will not be any unlockable games in the compilation; however, there is a complete gallery of classic iconic *Sonic* images to complete the experience."

Interestingly, it's usually the PSP that's rich in compilations, with a scant number of retro collections appearing on the DS. Maybe it's down to the machine having a younger audience who are less likely to remember or have even played the original games, or it could simply be down to storage capacity – although considering the size of PSP compilations such as *Capcom Classics*, which could easily fit on the average DS cart, this seems less than likely.

Regardless of the reasons, it doesn't change the fact that eight great little games will be heading to the DS very, very soon. We just wish that there were a few more titles to choose from… *

THE RETRO DEBATE

» Are you prepared to accept four games on new compilations?

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

Merman
Unless the extras include lots of video interviews and uncompressed artwork, I see no reason why they can't fit more than four games on a DS cart, even with a menu system taking up a lot of space.

Megamixer
The *Zero* compilation represents some decent value for money since it's four pretty recent – last-gen in terms of handhelds – hard-to-find-now games on a single card.

The *Sonic* one, however, is completely different since the games have been re-released so many times it's just annoying. Plus, their age and the size of the games involved is a clear indicator that much more could fit into the collection.

JetSetWilly
The *Mega Man* one sounds interesting, but *Sonic*? AGAIN? How many times can we play the same four *Sonic* games? Sega must be really, really desperate.

Antiriad2097
Given the amount of space they take up on my PSP, only four games on a cart is an insult unless they're under a tenner.

Rayne
Depends on the games really…

The *Mega Man Zero* games are really difficult to find these days and they're quality experiences. Each game holds at least ten hours of play time

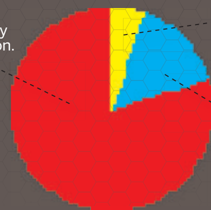
Sonic, while awesome, has been ported a billion times before, is readily available anywhere, and isn't designed for extended play sessions. Only four Sonic games is a bit of an insult to DS owners

Timothy Lumsden
The *Sonic* collection particularly offends. How often have these games been shilled to us?

batman877
I'll definitely be buying the *Mega Man* compilation – good value for money. I'll pass on the *Sonic* one, as I've already got the originals and several copies on various compilations.

FORUM OPINION

Should these compilations have more games?



retrocolumns

» RETRO RECOLLECTIONS WITH CELEB IAIN LEE

Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *2 Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.



Hi there, my name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro

20 Goto Hell

Old games were great. The olden days were much better for games. We love hardware from the Seventies, Eighties and some of the Nineties although we can't agree on when retro ends and modern begins. We all bum all aspects of old Video games. Right?

Wrong!

There is one thing from back in the day that sucked a fat one and I'm glad it has no place in modern gaming. I'm overjoyed that kids today are free from these shackles and it's wonderful that the mighty **Retro Gamer** feels inclined to ignore this historical muff-up.

I am, of course, referring to the phenomenon of typing in games from magazines and crappy books.

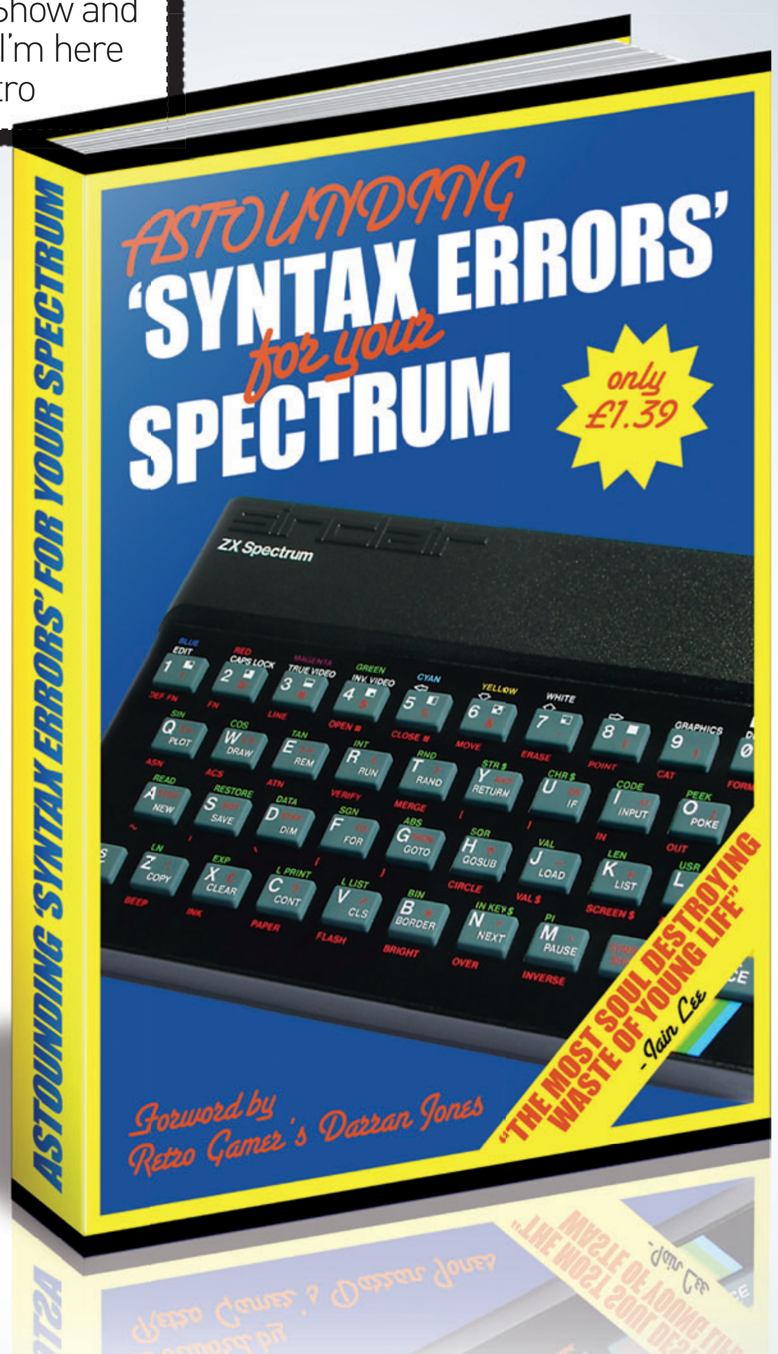
Jesus Christ, this was surely the most soul destroying waste of young life. It would have been more productive to send 11-year olds up chimneys to clean the soot off with their genitals than allow them to sit in front of a computer screen for six hours typing in a game so bad that not even Bug Byte Software would publish it.

I remember once my friend Colin Nelson persuaded some of us to sit for a whole day typing in one of these abominations. We were all convinced that this was actually going to be better than any game we already had (and we had *Cylon Attack*, which was blinding). He read out the listing, we did the typing. It took forever. There was a huge sense of anticipation in the air as we finished the final line. Huddling around the screen, I entered the magic instruction 'RUN' and sat back to watch this graphical masterpiece work its stuff. Sadly, all that happened was we were greeted by the most hated phrase of the early 1980's – 'SYNTAX ERROR'.

Disappointed but not broken-hearted I took the magazine from Colin so we could go through the code line by line. Typing in always left a few mistakes; this was nothing to worry about. Imagine the hilarity that ensued when I saw that our uber-muppet of a friend had been reading the code for a TRS-80 game. We were using a BBC Micro. What was he thinking? No one had a TRS-80.

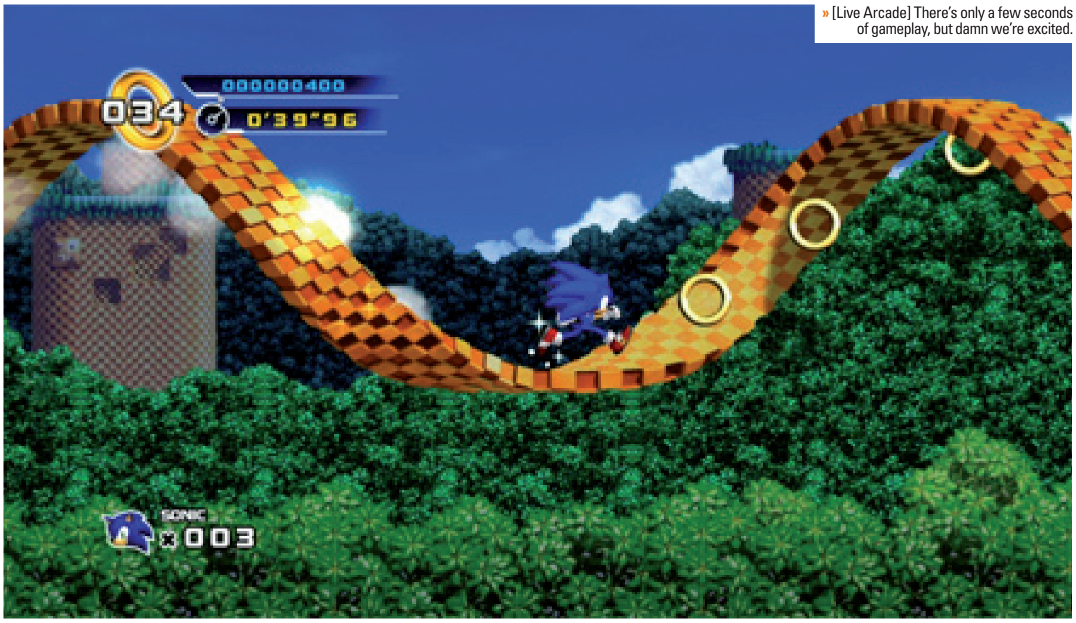
The problem was swiftly resolved by administering a series of dead arms and then shoving 'Your Computer' magazine up his joystick port. Suffice to say, he never made the same mistake again.

But the thing is, even if we had been typing a game for the right computer, it would still have been a huge, pointless spurt of everyone's time into the sticky sock of life. As typers, we thought we were cheating the system – that we would actually have a game better than anything John Menzies had to offer and we would get it for free. But no. Games from listings magazines were always, ALWAYS, utter pony. They provided only fleeting pleasure and self-satisfaction before the painful realisation hit us that we had achieved nothing and life, was ultimately, futile.



He was reading code for a TRS-80 game. We were using a BBC Micro. What was he thinking?

What's your favourite videogames moment? Beating Miyamoto at *Mario Bros.* in the Nintendo headquarters in Kyoto!



» [Live Arcade] There's only a few seconds of gameplay, but damn we're excited.

PROJECT NEEDLEMOUSE IS UNVEILED AS SONIC 4

SONIC 4 - IT'S OFFICIAL



Sega has been teasing us with titbits about the direction of its upcoming 2D retro-inspired *Sonic* game for a few months now, but we can finally reveal – like you didn't already know – that *Project Needlemouse* is, in fact, *Sonic 4*.

The first announcement by Sega that a new *Sonic* game was coming happened last September, to ostensibly tie in with the 10th anniversary of the Dreamcast launch in North America. The teaser trailer that Sega released gave very little about the game away; just some words and the logo that looked similar to the original *Sonic* symbol, but concealed by shadow – don't panic, not that Shadow. But when a representative from Sega revealed that the game would see Sonic return to his retro roots to appease old-school fans, to say we were pleased by the revelation was a bit of an understatement. Well, apart from some vague-looking character and background art popping up on Sega of America's website, and the promise that the new game will be culling nearly all of those annoying peripheral characters from previous entries in the series, all has been quiet on the *Project Needlemouse* front. Until now…

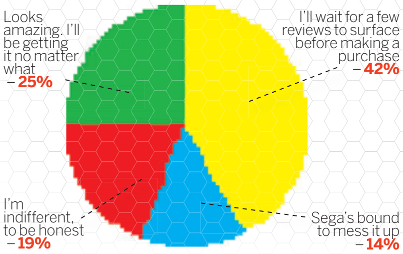
Sega recently dropped the bombshell that *Project Needlemouse* is actually *Sonic The Hedgehog 4: Episode 1*. The game is coming to Xbox Live Arcade, PlayStation Network and WiiWare this summer, and is said to directly follow on from the events of *Sonic & Knuckles*, disregarding any of the questionable subsequent games. Furthermore, the game will be episodic, in high definition, directly inspired by the Mega Drive era, see a return of the special stages, and will only give the player control of Sonic himself, who has been afforded a brand new homing attack.

Please don't mess this up, Sega. After the werehog fiasco, we honestly don't think we can stomach much more of this abuse. *

FORUM OPINION

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

What's your opinion on Sonic 4?



"The promise of a return to what Sonic does best is always a good thing, but I can't help thinking that we've been here before many times" – **Space_turnip**

"Looks fantastic, but download only? If this got a physical release I'd buy it" – **Graedient**

"Buying this day one. Even if it's just *Sonic 1* remade slightly. Even if it sucks bollocks. But hopefully this will be something as good as *Mega Man 9*" – **gmintyfresh**

MICRO BYTES

Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



Latest YouTube news

www.youtube.com/user/retrogamerdaz

Darran's now amassed over 1,000 subscribers, so be sure to join in the fun. The latest videos include a look at one of the rarest PAL Dreamcast games and a brand new feature called 'Same Name, Different Game' that looks at the differences between various versions of popular games. If there's enough interest it may become a magazine feature.



Samurai Shodown: Sen gets spring release

While the game has been out in Japanese arcades for a while now, *Samurai Shodown: Sen*, the latest 3D stab at SNK's popular fighting series, is finally getting a 360 release in the UK this spring. Considering that the arcade game was announced back in 2006 and has been undergoing intense beta testing in Japan since, we hope this is going to be good.



RG comes to your iPhone

If you're an iPhone, iPod or soon to be iPad user looking to read your favourite magazine on the go then you may be interested to learn that **Retro Gamer** is now available to download. Through a revolutionary new app, you'll be able to flick and zoom through the pages, bookmark features, and even download back issues. It goes live very soon. The current issue is £1.19 while back issues for £2.99.

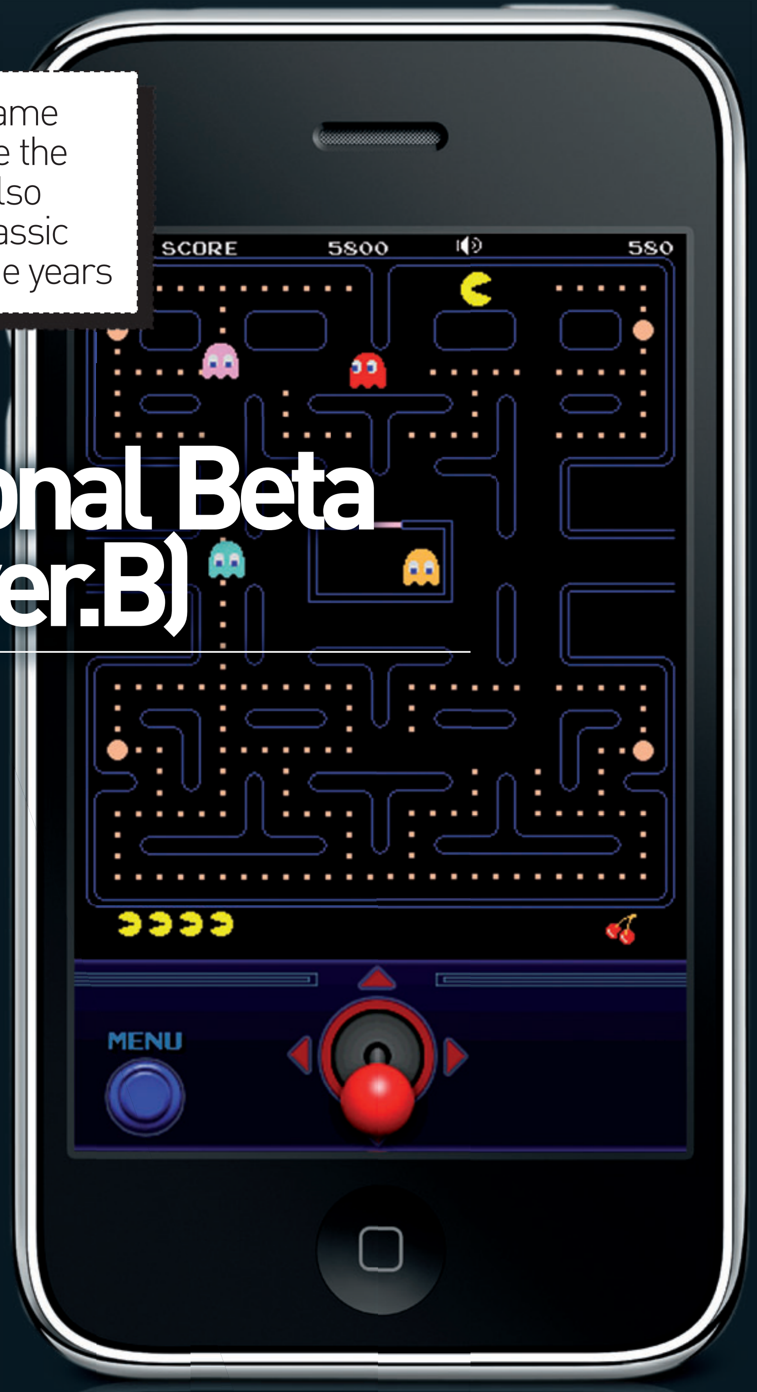
retro columns

» PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio...
In 1992 I started out on Mean Machines Sega and Nintendo Magazine System. In 1995 I became editor of C&VG. I led the C&VG website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years



Game X International Beta EX Plus iPhone (ver.B)

I finally got an iPhone. I've heard about *Doodle Jump,* but it can wait. I'm more concerned about owning old arcade games for now. Every journey must have its beginning, though mine almost ended with *Pac-Man*. Proper games need buttons!

Final Fantasy I & II are coming to iPhone, and might already have landed by the time you're reading this. This is still big news for me; an occasion that would've been seen as monumental when I worked on Nintendo Magazine System were it known as iPhone Magazine System (NMS was the first official Nintendo rag in the UK. RIP).

I wonder when the re-re-re-release of classic games will cease. It's not as if I genuinely intend to buy them, since I had my fill from the original tape/disc(s)/cartridge/CD. Knowing they're available via Xbox LIVE, PlayStation Network, Wii Shop (or whatever) is important though. I get genuinely grumpy about stones left unturned… such as Super NES classics *Plok* and *Earthbound*, all yet to appear. Shocking.

With each new generation of mobile-phone-gaming-gizmo released, publishers will trawl their back catalogues. They're always going to torment me just as surely as they'll disappoint me after years of existing as fond memories. Like how *Resident Evil Zero* on Wii is making me relive a battle against this giant centipede, which now seems truly daft; this is kind of education in classics that makes the transition from evergreen to archive material.

Stay with me, because I feel like a point is brewing… You and I are big into retro games, either because we remember them from time, or because we respect them as true originals. But are all the folks downloading *Pac-Man* and especially *Final Fantasy* from iTunes doing so out of nostalgia? Are they forgiving? I like to imagine these games retain their innocent charm, but apparently not always.

In the customer reviews for *Pac-Man* on iTunes, one guy is complaining that there's only one level. That's right, pal – but different fruit, if you hadn't noticed. A lot of retro games do seem odd taken out of the context of their era. This thought has made me miserable all day. But this is also why I appreciate **Retro Gamer;** it explains what still matters and what originally mattered so very well.

And so all is not lost; I reckon there's now a great opportunity for **RG** to provide a service that keeps track of all the classics appearing, letting everyone know how they compare to the originals, or how the old-school arcade and console games fare against modern-day match-three and basic action genres. Just so I know what's out there, and can stop typing random words like *Rastan* or *Moon Cresta* into the App store search window. Any volunteers, lads?

In the customer reviews for Pac-Man, one guy complains that there's only one level

What's your favourite iPhone retro game? *Pac-Man* (I'm getting used to it now).

OFFICIALLY THE BEST BIT OF NEWS YOU'LL HEAR ALL YEAR

THE RUMOUR MILL RECKONS THAT SEGA IS OFFERING UP THE RIGHTS TO SHENMUE III

Speaking to the 360 version of popular Japanese computer game magazine *Famitsu,* Sega reignited new hope that its cult *Shenmue* series could finally get a third game. The previous *Shenmue* games, while garnering a passionate following, failed to sell well at retail and recoup their high production costs, costing Sega millions and harming any hopes of a third game giving closure to Ryo's quest to hunt down Lan Di.

In the interview, Sega expressed interest in continuing the franchise, but is understandably wary of the previous game's modest commercial success. To this end, it is considering the possibility of offering up the exclusivity rights to the *Shenmue* series to one of the three hardware manufacturers – Nintendo, Sony and Microsoft – to get the cash required to make the project happen.

We can picture now the advantages of the game appearing on any of the three current consoles. The Wii's motion sensor capabilities will be perfectly harmonised to the game's FREE system, and the PS3 is already home of the popular *Yakuza* series, a franchise not entirely dissimilar to *Shenmue*. Finally, *Shenmue II* has already appeared on the Xbox, published by Microsoft, no less, and the franchise could be the perfect opportunity for Microsoft to further increase the popularity of its machine in the Far East.

We're not fussy, though. We'd take *Shenmue III* on any format – even the Atari Jaguar. Let's just hope one of the big boys bites Sega's arm off and the project can finally happen. *

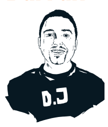


» [Dreamcast] One day, we'll find out how this story is supposed to end.



* WHAT WE THINK

Darran



I've no idea how possible it is, but I'd be happy with the original game on Live Arcade as episodic content. Maybe that's the way forward for the series in general. On the other hand, I quite like the thought of playing a new *Shenmue* on the Wii.

Stuart



Pleased as punch, over the moon, bursting with joy. I honestly couldn't be more pleased about this news. I'm getting giddy just thinking about how the next instalment in the *Shenmue* saga could play out. What planet is this again?

David



Considering that *Shenmue* was an all-time open-world Sega classic, it was a shame that the sequel ended on such an unresolved cliffhanger. If it picks up the pace and Sega can pull it off, I'm sure people will queue round the block for *III*.



WHAT IF?

Your favourite current-gen games remade, retro-style

Subject No 8

Modern Warfare 2

MODERN WARFARE 2 WAS officially the biggest thing in the world ever. Infinity Ward's gazillion-selling sequel put the entire gaming world into a frenzy, upsetting Russia in the process.

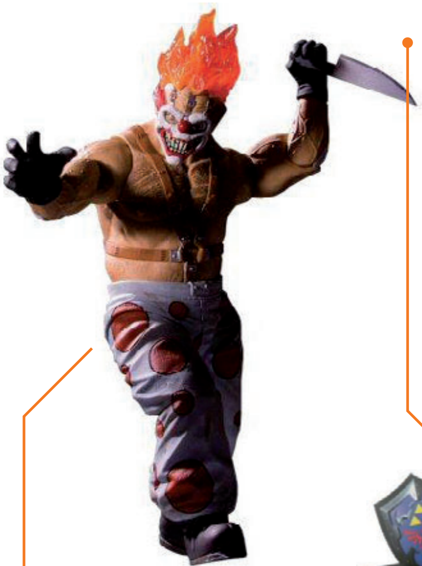
But what if it was released in the Nineties? Well, we think it would have looked a lot like another popular warfare title that also courted controversy. *Cannon Fodder* is where this month's 'What If?' takes its inspiration.



» [Amiga] If the image looks murky, it's due to Trev using the original Amiga resolution.

Retro Booty

Treasures from the Retro Deep



Twisted Metal: Sweet Tooth Action Figure

- **RRP:** £15.99
- **Manufacturer:** DC Direct
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

We love the way that videogames always insist on depicting future sports as violent gladiatorial-type games where everybody is out to kill everyone else as brutally as possible. Apparently, *Twisted Metal* is how Formula 1 will play in the future, and this is a statuette of the game's crazed ice-cream man character, Sweet Tooth.

NES & Zelda Retro Game Sweets

- **RRP:** £4.49
- **Manufacturer:** Boston America
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

One thing that never goes out of fashion is sweets. It's true. Sweets, like bread, eggs and milk, are enduring food products that will be here forever. Trends in the food market have no effect on their popularity, hence our particular like for the synergy between retro games and said food product on display through these Nintendo-themed retro game sweeties.





12" Sonic The Hedgehog Statue

- **RRP:** £79.99
- **Manufacturer:** First 4 Figurines
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

Sometimes retro merchandise comes our way that leaves us scratching our heads wondering who and why. Take this Sonic the Hedgehog statuette, which, even if it was released at the peak of the needlemouse's popularity, would still have us questioning its appeal. With a new *Sonic* game in the works, we thought the item quite timely.

Mario Outline T-Shirt

- **Price:** £11.99
- **Manufacturer:** Unknown
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

Simple, understated and post-box red, this natty *Mario* tee, which depicts the Italian butterball in an arms-crossed pose, is stylish enough that you could probably wear it to a wedding or christening and the vicar wouldn't bat an eyelid. What's the deal with the insanity in Mario's eyes, though?



Retro Console Canvas Prints

- **RRP:** A3 £40 / A1 £80 plus £8.50 postage
- **Manufacturer:** Retro Console Pics
- **Buy it from:** www.retroconsolepics.com

While you might have a struggle on your hands convincing the missus that your lounge would look better for having a nice high-quality canvas picture of a Spectrum nailed to it, we reckon that with the aid of some quick hypnosis lessons you'll be able to force her into agreeing to the idea.



Tabletop Arcade Machine

- **RRP:** Prices vary from £899 - £1199
- **Manufacturer:** Elite Gaming
- **Buy it from:** www.elitegaming.org.uk

Back in the Eighties and Nineties, owning your own arcade machine was deemed a pipe dream, a fantasy only attainable by rich and famous people like Kim Basinger and Billy Crystal. Now, though, thanks to companies like Elite Gaming, realising that dream is possible on a blacksmith's wage. Hurrah!



Treasure of the Month

Street Fighter IV Tournament Edition S Arcade Stick

- **RRP:** TBC
- **Author:** MadCatz
- **Buy it from**: www.amazon.co.uk



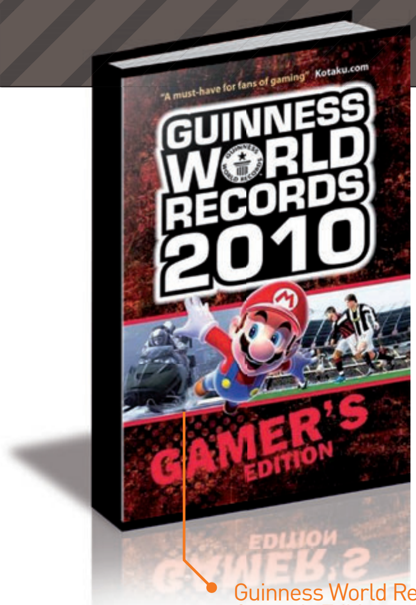
As you've probably gathered given our unashamed love of all things *3rd Strike* and *Garou*, we're massive fans of beat-'em-ups in the office. Old or new, we're not especially fussy, as long as we have our dependable arcade sticks by our sides to create that authentic arcade experience, and the games aren't rubbish. To celebrate the forthcoming release of *Super Street Fighter IV* this year, MadCatz is releasing a lavish-looking arcade stick. Made from actual Sanwa arcade parts and featuring a button-locking system to prevent accidental mid-game interruptions, the Tournament S Stick – the 'S' stands for 'slim' – is a must-buy for any self-respecting *SF IV* fan who takes their game seriously.



Donkey Kong T-Shirt

- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

The finest videogame ever made, *Donkey Kong* pioneered and popularised the platform game genre in one fell swoop, changing the face of videogames forever. He also helped to make celebs out of videogame heroes, which is why we can now buy videogame merchandise like this.



Guinness World Records 2010 Gamer's Edition

- **RRP:** £14.99
- **Manufacturer:** Guinness World Records Limited
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

Ever wondered what the rarest console fighting game on earth is? Or who holds the fastest completion of *Lost Planet: Extreme Condition*? Then wonder no more because the 2010 *Gamer's Edition* of the factoid-filled *Guinness Book Of World Records* holds all the answers.

Coin Opera

- **Price:** £6 (including postage)
- **Manufacturer:** Sidekick Books
- **Buy it from:** www.drfulminare.com

Do you like poetry? We do. Our favourite poet is Anon – she's amazing. If you, like us, enjoy reading poems, then you may like this pocket-sized book from Sidekick Books, featuring a selection of witty and snappy verses all based on retro games.





Black Mesa Mug

- **Price:** $12.99 (approx £8)
- **Manufacturer:** Valve Corporation
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

Given that he was late for work, poor old Gordon Freeman didn't even get a chance to grab a hot cup of joe on the day the shit hit the fan at the Black Mesa facility and he was forced to save the world. Hopefully he got the chance to grab a well-deserved one afterwards.





Gamer Grub Energy Snacks

- **RRP:** $3.99 - $8.99 (£3 - £6)
- **Manufacturer:** Biosolo Foods
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

Ever tried eating an entire Black Forest gateau while playing videogames? It makes your control pad all horrible and greasy. Well, some bright company has seen a niche in the market and filled it with the ultimate gamer snack, which comes in a handy resealable foil pack that can be used as a food funnel.

Konami Code T-Shirt

- **RRP:** $17.99 (approx £11)
- **Manufacturer:** thinkgeek.com
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

The Konami code is a perpetual cheat code that works in many Konami games, and some non-Konami titles, to unlock bonus lives and power-ups. So if you're a forgetful T-shirt-loving Konami fan, with access to a mirror, this tee might prove a useful purchase.

TOP FIVE T-SHIRTS



01 Gauntlet
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



02 Amstrad
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



03 Pac-Man
- **RRP:** £11.95
- **Manufacturer:** Namco
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

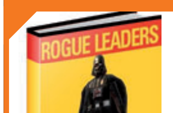


04 Donkey Kong
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



05 Dizzy
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

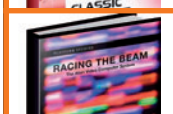
TOP FIVE BOOKS



01 Rogue Leaders: The Story Of LucasArts
- **RRP:** £34.99 **Publisher:** Titan Books
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



02 Classic Home Video Games 1985-1988
- **RRP:** £8.99 **Publisher:** Random House
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



03 Racing The Beam
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Publisher:** MIT Press
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



04 Game Over
- **RRP:** £22.14
- **Publisher:** Cyberactive Media Group
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



05 Gamespite Quarterly: Issue 3
- **RRP:** From $12 **Author:** Jeremy Parish
- **Buy it from:** www.gamespite.com

TOP FIVE MISCELLANEOUS



01 Panzer Dragoon Music Box
- **RRP:** £29.99
- **Manufacturer:** Unknown
- **Buy it from:** www.videogameimports.com



02 Pac-Man Hotplate Holder
- **RRP:** $14.99 (£9.23 approx)
- **Manufacturer:** Unknown
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



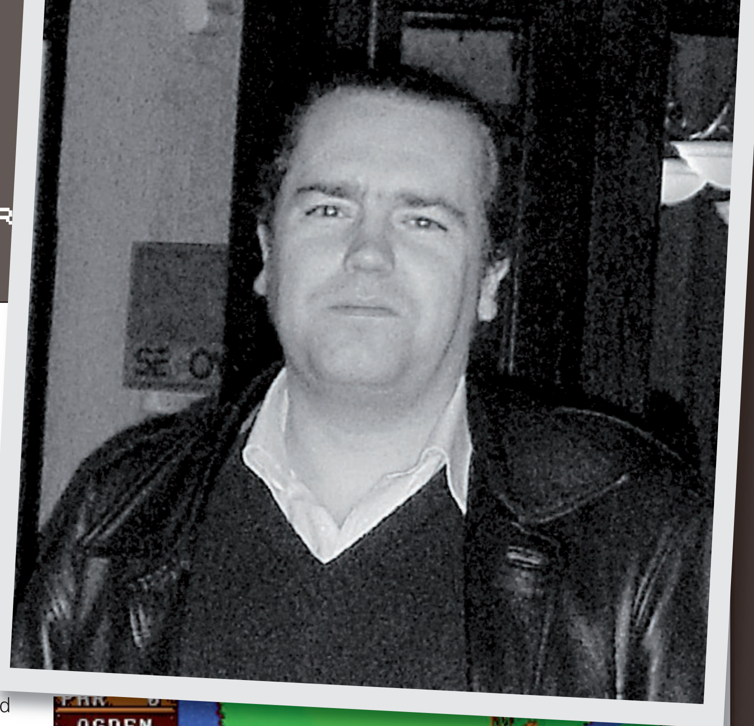
03 Tetris TV Game
- **RRP:** £9.99
- **Manufacturer:** Radica
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com



04 Sonic Costume
- **RRP:** £34.94
- **Manufacturer:** Heroes For Kids
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



05 Space Invaders Clock
- **RRP:** $80
- **Manufacturer:** Taito
- **Buy it from:** www.japantrendshop.com



* A MOMENT WITH...
Jon Hare

Every issue, we put an industry legend in the hotseat. This month, David Crookes met Jon Hare, founder of Sensible Software

Who is Jon Hare?

Jon Hare and Chris Yates formed a formidable partnership in the Eighties. Sensible Software would go on to produce an amazing series of games including *Mega Lo Mania, Cannon Fodder* and *Sensible Soccer*, and Hare has won many accolades and awards.

Which of your games would you recommend to our readers and why?
In general, *Sensible World Of Soccer* for sports fans who like fast multiplayer action and light accessible management, *Cannon Fodder* for boys who used to run around the playground pretending they were shooting each other, *Mega Lo Mania* for history swots and strategy heads, *Wizball* for the mad, annoying kids who jumped around a lot, and *Wizkid* for the space cadet kids who were smoking funny fags behind the bike sheds.

What is your proudest memory?
Winning the Indie Developer of the Year award for the second year running in the Nineties and when we were number one in the UK all-format charts for 52 weeks of a three-year period from 1992.

What's the most difficult thing you've encountered while working on a game?
Mega Lo Mania was very difficult to finish and the end of Sensible's three-game deal with Warner was a nightmare, both technically and from a business point of view.

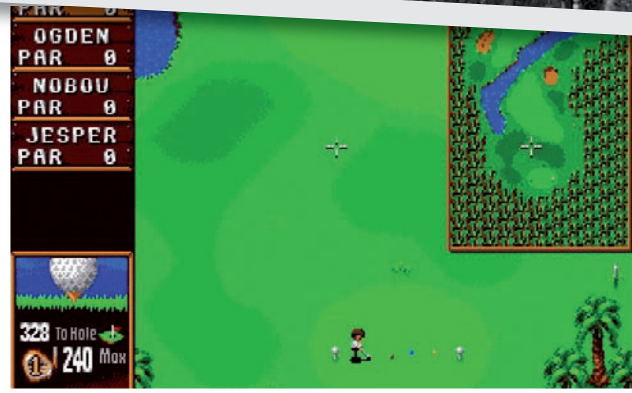
Which industry veteran do you admire?
Miyamoto. He is by a distance the best game designer that ever lived.

How would you like your games to be remembered?
As enjoyable, varied, genre-defining games that helped to shape and influence the games industry prior to its over-commercialisation.

Which game do you wish you'd made?
Space Invaders or *Mario 64*. They are the two most groundbreaking games of all time.

What opportunities has making videogames given you?
It has given me my entire professional life – enough money to own my house and have a bit tucked away for a rainy day. Games are a valid means of creative expression that has actually given me enough money to live on, and this is a fanciful dream for most artists.

What's your darkest memory of being in the games industry?
Well, 1998 was a year-long bout of palpitations and bad sleep stemming from fear of having to pay back £1 million to GT Interactive if they decided to flex their legal muscles in regard to our under-performance in our multi-game deal with them at the time. Thankfully nothing bad happened.



» *Sensible Golf* aimed to do for teeing off what *Sensi Soccer* did for kicking off.

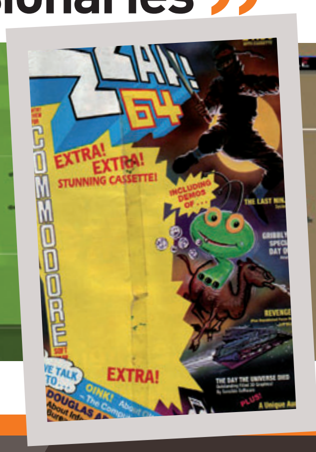
And your best?
The very first *Sensible Soccer* World Cup in our old offices in March, Cambridgeshire. We had a whole bunch of games journalists and TV people over, cans of beer, fish and chips at half time, Pavarotti singing the intro in two-frame animation. It was buzzing.

Can you share one interesting anecdote about your time in the industry?
In 1985 Chris Yates and I were showing off *Twister* at the first ECTS show I went to for Mark Cale's System 3. Mark hired some minimally dressed young girls to dance on stage. Another game Mark was promoting was *International Karate* and martial arts guys were smashing breeze blocks with their bare hands. The girls could no longer dance because the bits were sticking in their feet.

How has the industry changed over the last 20 years?
The rest of the world had overtaken UK development and publishing. The money men and empire builders have overpowered the creative visionaries. The public have become more conservative in their tastes, less able in their game playing. Online is starting to overpower retail. And some of our guys get MBEs and OBEs these days. *

"Gaming's money men and empire builders have overpowered the creative visionaries"







retrodiary

4 March - 31 March

» A month of retro events both past and present



4 March 2000
■ The PlayStation 2 made its worldwide retail debut in Japan. One day later it had sold 980,000 units.



6 March 1981
■ Sir Clive Sinclair launched his latest micro, the ZX81. Priced at £49.95, it was initially available only in kit form via mail order.



7 March 1983
■ Melbourne House releases *The Hobbit*, a graphic adventure for the Spectrum, based on the Tolkien book. A legend is born!



8 March 1983
■ The first issue of *Home Computing Weekly* from Argus Press appears in newsagents.



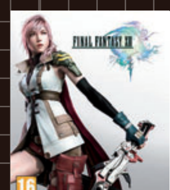
13 March 2009
■ The latest instalment of the survival horror franchise from Capcom, *Resident Evil 5*, was released in the UK on the Xbox 360 and PS3.



12 March 1982
■ Atari releases its anticipated Atari 2600 port of *Pac-Man*. Atari manufactured 12 million cartridges. Videogames crash, anyone?



11 March 2005
■ Nintendo's new handheld console, the dual screen DS, went on sale in the UK.



9 March 2010
■ Square Enix is due to release *Final Fantasy XIII* on the PS3 and Xbox 360 in Europe.



14 March 2002
■ Microsoft's Xbox console was released in Europe.



15 March 1984
■ The first issue of IPC Magazines' new multiformat games magazine, *Big K*, goes on sale.



16 March 1987
■ *Head Over Heels*, a seminal isometric game by Ritman and Drummond, was released on the Spectrum and Amstrad.



18 March 1982
■ The first issue of *Sinclair User* goes on sale, starting its impressive 134-issue run.



23 March 2007
■ After a couple of aborted launch dates, Sony's new console, the PlayStation 3, went on sale in Europe and Australia.

21 March 1969
■ The Japanese games developer, Konami Corporation, was founded. It started out life as a jukebox repair business.



19 March 2005
■ Tiger Telematics launches the Gizmondo handheld console in the UK for £229. Less than a year later, the company was bankrupt…



19 March 1994
■ Japan was the first to see the new *Super Metroid* game for the SNES. Europe would have to wait another four months…



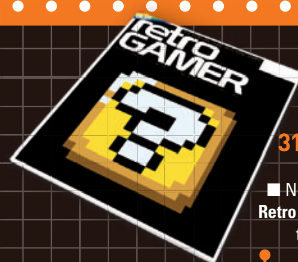
24 March 1947
■ Sir Alan Sugar, founder of Amstrad, which created the range of profitable home micros including the CPC464, was born.



26 March 2010
■ *Pokémon Heart Gold* and *Soul Silver* on the Nintendo DS are due to be released in Europe.



28 March 2003
■ Nintendo's latest Game Boy handheld, the Advance SP, was officially released in Europe.



31 March 2010
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

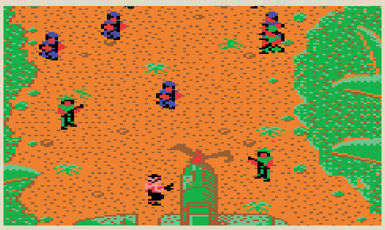
THE LATEST NEWS FROM MARCH 1988



MARCH 1988 – Juicy adventuring, 16-bit Codemasters, Zolyx Qix arse, Mastertronic fixes it, Cecco outs Rafaelle's Cybernoid and Logotron takes low self-esteem classes. Richard Burton creates a new game: Creosote The Shed Simulator… It's the greatest thing ever ever ever…



» [C64] Take a black background, colour it in blue with your yellow dot and you have yourself a retro-gaming classic!



» [C64] Elite Systems' conversion was superb. Data East's earlier attempt was pitiful.





» [Atari ST] There's only one rule in the dungeon: get your hand off my bush.

Adventuring had never been so fruity. Mandarin Software was launched with a reported £1 million budget to draw in the best development teams to produce the finest selection of games and adventures this side of Middle-earth.

Mandarin's first release would be a trilogy of adventures from the master of the art, Level 9. Although all re-releases, Mandarin's press release stated that the trilogy, called *Time And Magick* and featuring the games *Red Moon*, *The Price Of Magick* and *Lords Of Time*, would all be improved upon, with larger vocabularies and enhanced graphics. It would be released at the end of March and be available on 13 different systems.

Codemasters finally decided to enter the ever-evolving 16-bit world after huge success on the 8-bit formats, particularly with its '*Simulator*' series of games. Codemasters owners, the Darling brothers, hinted that their first 16-bit release would be the evergreen *BMX Simulator* on both the Atari ST and Amiga.

Although famed for its budget software pricing, the entry point for its new games would be £14.99 – so not budget priced, after all.



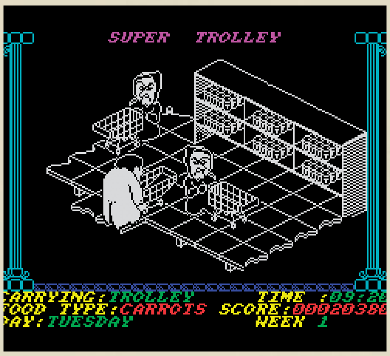
» [Spectrum] A great game on every system, including the Wii, as the C64 version is available.

Atari ST owners had had the magnificent *Dungeon Master* by Mirrorsoft all to themselves for the past month or three… but no longer. Mirrorsoft reported that it would be releasing an Amiga version and that it would be released by early summer. With anticipation high after the fantastic reception of the ST version, there was a distinct possibility that summer holidays would involve battling monsters and casting spells rather than sitting on a beach eating sand-encrusted two-ball Screwballs…

PC owners had a surprise this month when Elite Systems belatedly released *Frank Bruno's Boxing*. *Frank* was a top seller on the Spectrum when released over three years ago. Elite would surely welcome even a fraction of those original sales, particularly with the PC version priced at £19.99.

Elite continued the trend for late arrivals with the C64 conversion of *Ikari Warriors*, the *Commando*-style game. The Spectrum and Amstrad versions had been released at the start of 1987, so quite why there was a delay of well over a year is difficult to fathom.

Still, it arrived and was excellent, a relief considering the nauseating pile of old tosh that the earlier 1986 Tradewest conversion was. Thankfully it was a US release, so exposure to it was minimal in Europe.

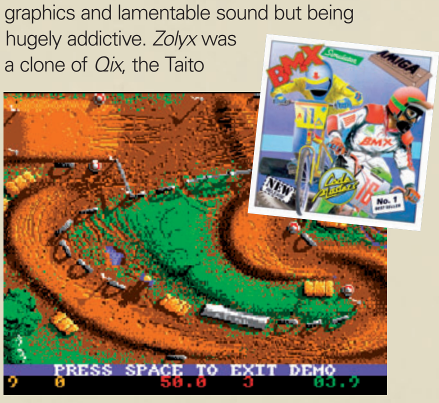


The PR guy at Logotron, a software developer with a largely anonymous history, had either suffered a blow to the head or had consumed vast quantities of magic mushrooms soaked in absinthe when he announced a progress report on the company's latest project, *StarRay*.

It proudly declared that *StarRay* would feature the best arcade programming ever and that it wasn't aware of any game to equal its quality. High praise indeed for a fairly bog-standard *Defender* clone…

Whether this was tongue-in-cheek product embellishment or misplaced hyperbole, all would be revealed in the summer when *StarRay* on the Amiga was released. So was it an epoch-defining piece of coding? No. It was what it was: a *Defender* clone with pretty graphics but only average gameplay.

A new game from the budget boys at Firebird was the complete polar opposite of *StarRay*, having virtually nothing in terms of graphics and lamentable sound but being hugely addictive. *Zolyx* was a clone of *Qix*, the Taito



» [Amiga] Codemasters had mastered budget gaming on the 8-bit micros. Now it was time to conquer the 16-bits…

1988

MARCH NEWS



» *Charles Goes Skiing* – one of Sinclair's lesser-known Spectrum releases…

16 March saw a gunman kill three mourners at a funeral being held at the Milltown Cemetery in Belfast. A further 50 people were injured as Michael Stone threw grenades into the crowd. The funeral was for three IRA members who were killed by the SAS while planning attacks on a British Army garrison. Stone was sentenced to 30 years in prison but served just 12 after being released as part of the Good Friday Agreement.

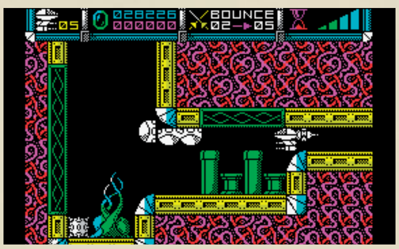
16 March saw high-casualty chemical attacks on the Kurdish city of Halabja in northern Iraq. The city had been occupied by Iranian forces during the Iran-Iraq War. Reports stated that several aircraft dropped a mixture of chemical weapons including sarin, VX and mustard gas, with approximately 5,000 people killed and a further 10,000 injured.



» It's showtime! Darran and Stuart discuss the finer points of CPC gaming at the daily staff meeting…

10 March saw Prince Charles involved in an avalanche at the ski resort of Klosters in Switzerland. Although he avoided injury, one member of the royal party, Major Hugh Lindsay, was killed and another suffered severe leg injuries. They had been skiing off-piste on a particularly difficult part of the mountain.

On a lighter note, 25 March saw the feel-good movie **batteries not included* released in UK cinemas while American audiences were treated to the worldwide premiere of *Beetlejuice*, starring Michael Keaton.



arcade game, which involved you attempting to fence off a specified percentage of the screen while avoiding dots. It sounds crap but was anything but.

Budget rival Mastertronic also had a new game ready for release, but this one had an interesting back story to it. Andrew Collett had written to *Jim'll Fix It*, the BBC television show that attempted to make kids' dreams come true, with an idea for a computer game that he would love to see become a reality.

The BBC liked the idea and roped in Mastertronic to turn Master Collett's jottings into a real product. With that, *Super Trolley* was born: a supermarket simulator that saw you going about your daily tasks within set time limits. It was released on the Spectrum,



» [C64] Logotron thought that *StarRay* was going to be the greatest game ever made. It was sadly mistaken.

Amstrad, C64 and MSX but only really stood out due to Mr Saville's involvement.

Due to be released by the end of March was programming legend Raffaele Cecco's latest graphical feast, *Cybernoid*. Published by Hewson, *Cybernoid* would severely test your trigger finger and mapping abilities as you battled pirates who have looted your federation's storage depots. You must go about retrieving these supplies while giving them a right royal blasting.

Superb graphics and sound combined with splendidly addictive gameplay ensured that Mr Cecco's reputation was enhanced. *Cybernoid* was available for the main formats and also on the NES.

In the review sections of the periodicals, *Crash* was found Smashing a few choice cuts this month with *Firefly* (Ocean/Special FX), *Garfield* (The Edge), *Northstar* (Gremlin Graphics) and *Platoon* (Ocean) on the end of the Spectrum magazine's top award.

Rival Spectrum publication, *Your Sinclair*, gave Megagame awards to a different selection, with *Gryzor* (Ocean), *Terramex* (Grandslam), *Flying Shark* (Firebird) and *Dan Dare II* (Virgin Games) all doing the business.

Newsfield's sister magazine *Zzap!64* gave the Gold Medal to *Project Stealth Fighter* (MicroProse), with *Predator* (Activision) receiving the sole Sizzler. However, to make up for the lack of full-priced excellence there were three Silver Medal winners for budget games: *I, Ball 2* (Firebird), *Battle Valley* (Rack It) and *Zybex* (Zeppelin Games).

Amstrad Action gave Mastergame status to *Deflektor* (Gremlin Graphics), with the lesser *AA* Rave being given to two more classics: *Bubble Bobble* (Firebird) and *Get Dexter 2* (ERE Informatique/Infogrames).

THIS MONTH IN...

THE GAMES MACHINE



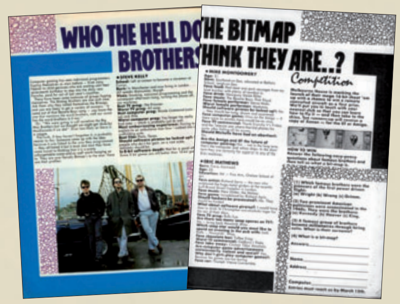
It shone out like a beacon. Roger Kean's ten-page interview with Ultimate Play The Game, which had recently become Rare, was, and still is, one of the finest interviews in a gaming magazine. To finally get an inside look at the mystical world of Ultimate made for captivating reading.



COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES



At the other end of the interviewing spectrum was this offering from *C&VG*, a quick Q&A with The Bitmap Brothers. With questions ranging in fluffiness from favourite TV adverts to favourite drinks, it seemed like a squandered opportunity. Eric Matthews – favourite music: The Nolans?



ATARI USER



Atari User featured an interview with one of the co-founders of Zeppelin Games, Brian Jobling. You would think having previously worked for Tynesoft writing and converting games to the Atari micros that you could make money. Well, 19-year-old Brian had bought a new Porsche with his earnings. Nice.



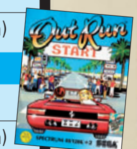
CHARTS

MARCH 1988



AMSTRAD

1. Solid Gold (US Gold)
2. Game Set & Match (Ocean)
3. Grand Prix Simulator (Codemasters)
4. Pro Ski Simulator (Codemasters)
5. Live Ammo (Ocean)



SPECTRUM

1. OutRun (US Gold)
2. Matchday II (Ocean)
3. Combat School (Ocean)
4. Grand Prix Simulator (Codemasters)
5. ATV Simulator (Codemasters)



COMMODORE 64

1. OutRun (US Gold)
2. Platoon (Ocean)
3. Matchday II (Ocean)
4. Combat School (Ocean)
5. Test Drive (Electronic Arts)

MUSIC

1. I Should Be So Lucky (Kylie Minogue)
2. Don't Turn Around (Aswad)
3. Together Forever (Rick Astley)
4. Joe Le Taxi (Vanessa Paradis)
5. Bomb The Bass (Beat Dis)



BACK TO THE NINETIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM SEPTEMBER 1992



SEPTEMBER 1992 – magazine mayhem, Mega Gauntlet, not so Mega PC, SNK goes SNES, Delphine has a Flashback, Psygnosis lets out the third Beast and heavyweight boxers go toe-to-toe. Richard Burton lands a haymaker on his Mattel Aquarius…



» Prepare to feel the power of the Mega PC with its 1Mb RAM, 40Mb hard drive and mighty 386SX processor.



» [Amiga] The third instalment of the *Beast* series and perhaps the best of the bunch.



» [Game Boy] A great success for Rare on the SNES, *Super RC Pro-Am* played great on the Game Boy too.

EMAP, publisher of the console-specific magazine *Mean Machines*, announced that it would cease publication, with the September issue being its last. However, the reasons for such a ruthless and abrupt conclusion to the popular magazine were good, with the title being split into two separate entities: *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*, the latter being officially endorsed by Nintendo.

Future Publishing also had news that in two months its new Super Nintendo magazine, *Super Play*, would be on newsagents' shelves. Future also had a Sega Mega Drive magazine joining its portfolio, *Mega*, out next month.

Joining *Super Play* and *Mega* in the new arrivals lounge of John Menzies was *Mega Drive Advanced Gaming*, published by Maverick Magazines, which was launched this month, and lastly, Europress Impact was distributing free taster copies of issue zero of *Amiga Power*. The first issue proper would be out next month.

But it was farewell to *The Micro User*, the long-running BBC Micro magazine, which shut up shop after a 115-issue run.



» Issue 115 was the last for *The Micro User*. It did continue under the name *Acorn Computing*, but the best had gone.

Atari hoped to continue its winning run with the *Gauntlet* franchise as it made public its progress on making the new Mega Drive conversion as faithful to the arcade machine as possible. Not only would it prove to be an excellent conversion of the original but it would also include three extra modes: Battle, Record and Quest. Rather confusingly, though, the game was released as *Gauntlet IV* in Europe and America.

After last month's release of the Gamekey add-on for the NES, which allowed imported games to be played on your UK console, it didn't take long for someone to create a SNES version. The Spellbound adaptor would do a similar job of letting your SNES take US and Japanese games, and for just £14.95. For something with such a rubbish name, it was worth its weight in gold.

Sega and Amstrad revealed that they would be getting together to create a European version of the hopelessly unsuccessful Japanese micro, the Sega Teradrive, an amalgam of low-spec PC and Mega Drive console. The new machine, the Mega PC, would appear later in 1993 and have one glaring difference to the Teradrive: you couldn't use the machine for Mega Drive software development.



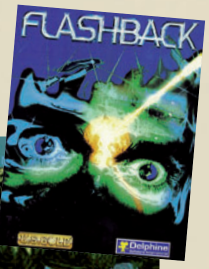
» [Mega Drive] It's a smidge more arcade-oriented than other heli-sims, which works in its favour.

The Mega PC could be either a PC or console, but not both at the same time. The Teradrive was different in that both parts could function simultaneously, allowing for the PC to be used for Mega Drive software development and testing simultaneously.

The £999 price tag was also a major stumbling block, although it was slashed shortly afterwards to £599. However, the Mega PC failed to capture the enthusiasm of gamers and spreadsheet addicts alike.

If you fancy a punch in the face then look no further than two newly promised games: *George Foreman's KO Boxing* and *Evander Holyfield's Real Deal Boxing*, both due to appear on the Mega Drive. Graphically, *Foreman* went for an over-the-shoulder view, while *Holyfield* plumped for a more conventional beat-'em-up side view. There wasn't much between the two games in terms of playability, with *Holyfield* just edging it on points overall.

Maybe they should have combined their efforts to release the *Holyfield/Foreman Lean*





» [Amiga] If you thought that *Another World* was good, prepare to duff in your undergarments, because here's *Flashback*…

1992

SEPTEMBER NEWS

24 September saw Heritage Minister David Mellor resign. He had been in the newspapers after it was revealed that the married MP had been having an affair with 'actress' Antonia De Sancha.

She had sold her story to the *News Of The World* and revealed that Mr Mellor liked to wear a Chelsea football shirt during his visits. Although this 'fact' was unsubstantiated, the affair itself was never in doubt, as De Sancha's flat had been bugged and phone calls recorded. Ten years later, De Sancha revealed that the football shirt detail had been fabricated and implied that it was concocted by Max Clifford, although he strongly denied this.



» If you need a bird stuffing, Norman's your man…



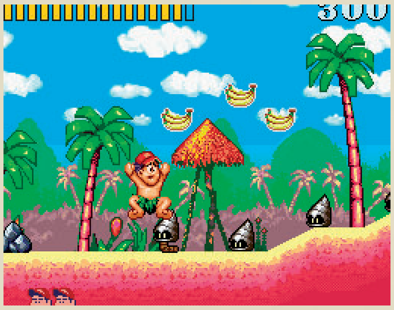
» Presumably, Mellor exhibited some top-notch ball skills…

25 September saw the launch of NASA's Mars Observer, designed to provide a detailed study of the red planet. After a 337-day journey and just three days before it was due to enter its orbit around Mars, all contact was lost.

On 12 September Anthony Perkins, best known for the role of Norman Bates in *Psycho*, died aged 60 from an AIDS-related illness. Tragically, his wife, Berry Perkins, died almost exactly nine years later when the plane she was on, American Airlines Flight 11, struck the North Tower of the World Trade Center.



» [Mega Drive] Warrior or not, it may be time to peg it out of ghost central…



» [SNES] *Super Adventure Island* was a colourful but fairly basic platform game. Fun but certainly no *Mario*!



Mean Punch In The Face Earlobe Grilling Machine Simulator. We'd buy it…

There was great news for SNES and Mega Drive owners as SNK Corporation, the force behind the wonderful Neo Geo console, announced plans to start converting several of its games. Among the first titles to be ported would be *King Of The Monsters*, a mediocre fighting game featuring Godzilla-esque monsters in various city locations, and *Fatal Fury*, an acceptable 2D one-on-one fighting game.

Delphine Software had brought us the jaw-droppingly brilliant *Another World* on the Amiga and had once again teamed up with US Gold to try to recreate the magic with its new project, *Flashback*.

Delphine released an update on its progress and showed off various screenshots of the new 2D adventure to the press. It looked to have a very similar feel to *Another World*, almost to the point of being mistaken for a sequel. It wasn't, as the later release, *Heart Of The Alien* on the Sega Mega-CD, was the official sequel.

Flashback looked superb, and when it was released in the spring of '93 on the Amiga and Mega Drive, everyone marvelled at its greatness. The Amiga version rates as one of the best games on the system.

Psygnosis was close to releasing the third instalment of the *Shadow Of The Beast* series, subtitled *Out Of The Shadow. Beast III* refined the gameplay of the previous two offerings to become arguably the highlight of the series. It was due for release within the month on the Amiga.

The reviews section for the last issue of *Mean Machines* was sadly bereft of any game worthy of Mega Game status, although many of the near-misses should have perhaps received the award. Among those missing out by a gnat's whisker were *Alien 3* (Acclaim, Mega Drive), *Dinosaurs* (Irem, SNES), *LHX Attack Chopper* (Electronic Arts, Mega Drive), *Ninja Gaiden* (Sega, Master System) and *Thunder Force IV* (Technosoft, Mega Drive).

It was a similar story with *N-Force*. Just two attained the Knockout badge of honour: *The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past* and *SimCity* (both Nintendo, SNES), with some excellent games narrowly missing out including *Mario & Yoshi* (Nintendo, Game Boy), *Super Adventure Island* (Hudson Soft, SNES) and *Super RC Pro-Am* (Rare, Game Boy).

THIS MONTH IN…



THE ONE

Andrew Braybrook continued his diary covering the development of his latest project, *Uridium 2*. Diary highlights included consulting Tony Crowther on how to fool a PAL Amiga into thinking it was an NTSC machine and comparing his homing missile routine to a tin can fetish. Yeah baby – mushy peas…





AMIGA POWER

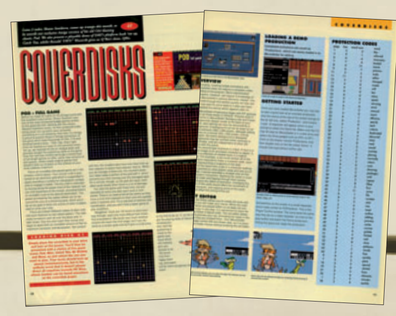
A superb set of interviews in 'Pop Stars And Their Games' stood out in this issue, with Sean Moore, a Manic Street Preacher, revealing his gaming preferences. So, worst game? *James Pond*. Favourite game? *Sonic The Hedgehog*.





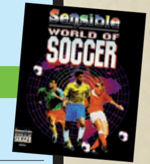
CU AMIGA

Featured game on the cover disk this month was *POD: Proof Of Destruction*, a conversion of the 8-bit classic. Unfortunately, ELSPA was less than enthusiastic to learn of this Amiga version appearing free so promptly banned *CU Amiga* from including any further cover-mounted conversions.



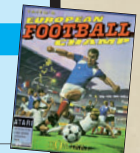
CHARTS

SEPTEMBER 1992



AMIGA

1. Sensible Soccer (Renegade)
2. Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge (Lucasfilm/US Gold)
3. Striker (Rage)
4. Championship Manager (Domark)
5. Epic (Ocean)



ATARI ST

1. European Football Championship (Domark)
2. Epic (Ocean)
3. Space Crusade (Gremlin Graphics)
4. Graham Taylor's Soccer Challenge (Krisalis)
5. Fire And Ice (Graftgold/Renegade)



MEGA DRIVE

1. Desert Strike (Electronic Arts)
2. Olympic Gold: Barcelona '92 (US Gold)
3. Kid Chameleon (Sega)
4. Road Rash (Electronic Arts)
5. Streets Of Rage (Sega)

MUSIC

1. Ebeneezer Goode (The Shamen)
2. Rhythm Is A Dancer (Snap!)
3. Baker Street (Undercover)
4. It's My Life (Dr Alban)
5. Too Much Love Will Kill You (Bryan May)



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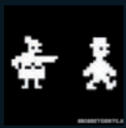
READER'S REVIVAL

I, BALL

ROLL PLAYER



- » **PUBLISHER:** FIREBIRD SOFTWARE
- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ZX SPECTRUM
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID



HISTORY

***I, Ball* was a fantastic budget shoot 'em up, and one of the few Spectrum games I completed. When you loaded the game up, you would get fantastic sampled speech screaming out at you. When you lost a life Ball would scream 'OH NO!' This was the Eighties and such things were obviously cutting-edge (speech in games!). The game also screamed 'WAR!' at you, and (making less sense) 'POWER DRIFT!'.**

You are Ball and have to rescue Lover Ball, Eddy Ball, Glow Ball and No Ball (!). You had ten power-ups for your Ball shooter, and have to scroll up the screen firing round ball-like bullets. The enemies spawned into position, and this gave you some time to shoot them before they became deadly. You could fly back down the screen as well, as obstacles sometimes required this. You could also shoot up and down the levels, but not horizontally.

The game was quite challenging, as the enemies would follow you (though not shoot). The blocky graphics were quite cartoony and colourful and it was quite interesting to try and get the better power-ups (just even to see what they did). There was also a sequel released a year later, which kept the sampled speech, but tidied things up a bit.

I remember being alone in my parents' house in the Eighties on a summer day, playing this constantly (no radio on, nothing). I played on this for hours until I finally completed the game. There was a standard congratulations screen and a telephone number to call, so I wrote it all down feverishly, and then agonised about phoning up until I finally plucked up the courage to do so and was welcomed by a surprised voice that said, 'Oh right, congratulations.' And that was it.

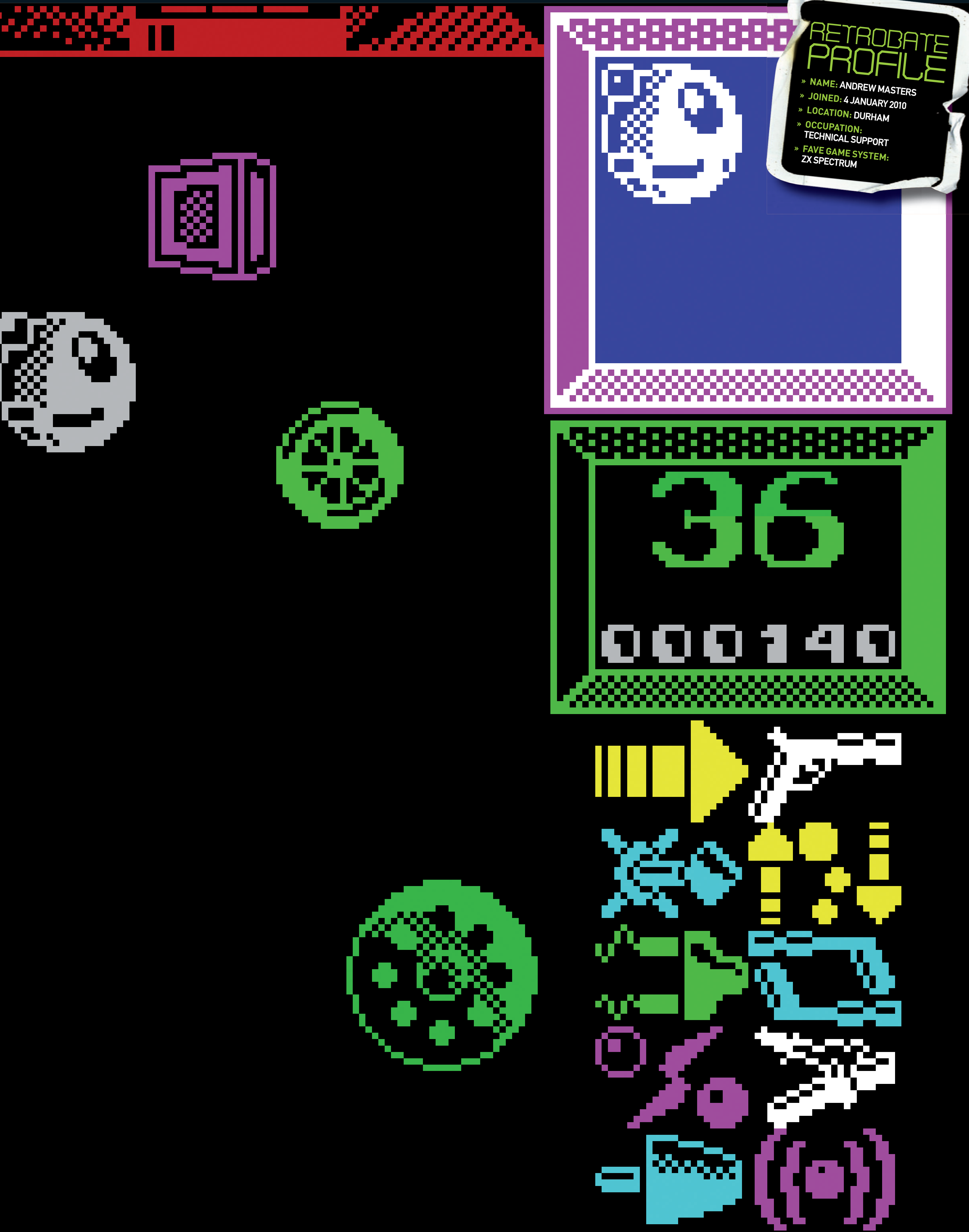
I then spent hours during the rest of the afternoon making a small A5-sized certificate in my own stenciled handwriting, framed it and nailing it onto the wall. It amazes me how much time I really had for things like this in the 80s! Great memories.

Want to appear in the magazine? Be sure to upload your classic profiles at www.retrogamer.net



RETROBATE PROFILE

» **NAME:** ANDREW MASTERS
» **JOINED:** 4 JANUARY 2010
» **LOCATION:** DURHAM
» **OCCUPATION:** TECHNICAL SUPPORT
» **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** ZX SPECTRUM



The Definitive... GHOSTS'N

"What the hell was I thinking?"

ponders Stuart Campbell as he restarts Level 1 for the 420th time

Capcom's *Ghosts 'N Goblins*, if you think about it, is a lot like *OutRun*. Which is to say, it's a game in which a little bit of character and humour, allied to high-quality graphics and distinctive music, go a long way to cover up what, in fact, is often some pretty mediocre game design [Not true. - Ed]

What's more, most of the sequels don't address any of the flaws in the design, but instead amplify them to insane degrees. And yet the series remains hugely popular. It looks as if gamers just really enjoy seeing a muscly man with a beard prancing around in his pants. Readers can draw their own conclusions.

The game features a plot lifted from the legend of the Knights of the Round Table, fed through a Japanese filter involving Lucifer and his demons in Hades. The hero, Sir Arthur, is invariably tasked with retrieving Princess Guinevere – though her name changes throughout the series – and the newest title also features Sir Lancelot and several levels feature Camelot in their names. It's revealed in *Ultimate Ghosts 'N Goblins* that the demons apparently want to shag the princess "to mix their blood with the royal family" as part of their plans to rule the world. Arthur, being British, realises that this simply isn't on, and dons his underpants and shiny armour and sets off to the rescue.

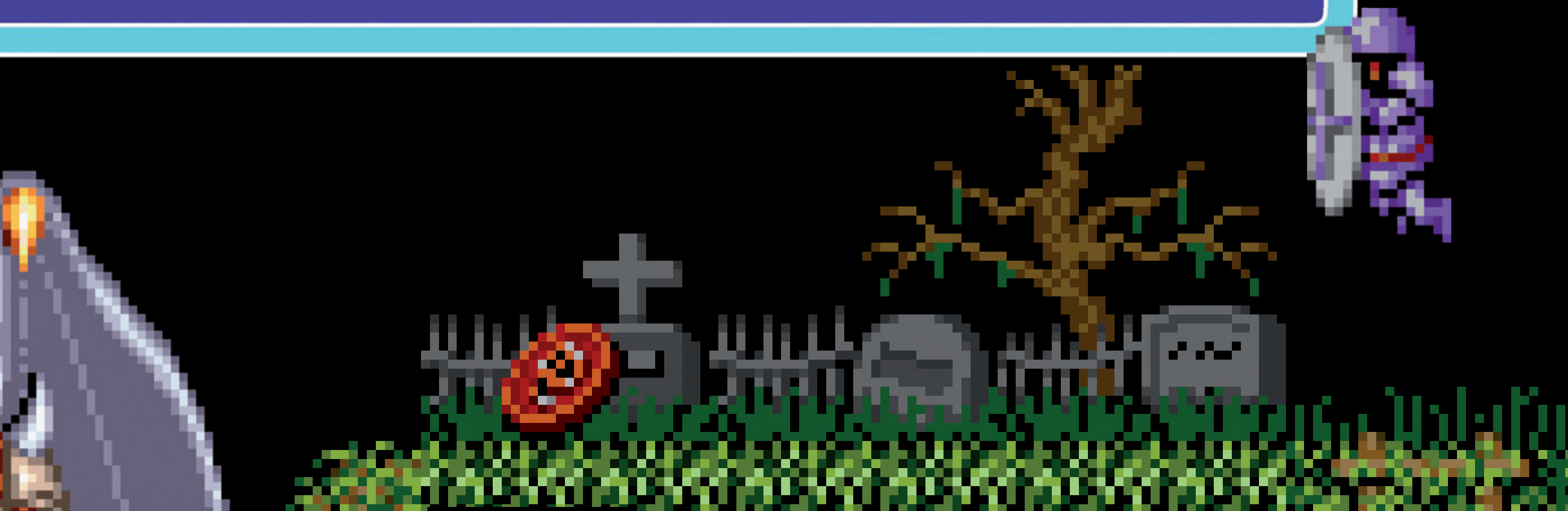
In the same way that *OutRun* is chiefly lauded by nostalgic gamers for its music – and, to a slightly lesser extent, graphics – the defining theme of the *GNG* series is its difficulty. Starting off tough and getting more brutal with each new release, the ferocity of the series is legendary and provides a testing ground where the hardest of the hardcore can set their skills against the game's designers.

The latter are led by director Tokuro Fujiwara, who created all the main releases in the series despite leaving Capcom for almost a decade between 1996 and 2005, and was also responsible for most of the company's *Mega Man* platformers, which make up *GNG*'s only serious competition for the title of the toughest game series of all time. "I hate all videogame players and I want them to suffer every moment until they die," was the most memorable quote he gave in an interview that we dreamt once after being up all night trying to get to Level 3 of *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts*.





GOBLINS



1985

Ghosts 'N Goblins (Arcade)

Most of the gameplay flaws of the *GNG* series are present from the off, but the first title in the line is still a pretty enjoyable game. The first few levels are highly atmospheric, helped by some evocative harpsichord music and what, for the time, were exceptional graphics. And despite some unfair enemies – when you first meet Red Arremer/Firebrand halfway through Level 1 he rarely ventures anywhere that your weapons can actually reach, and killing him is largely a matter of luck and/or extreme patience – and leaps of faith, where you're expected to leap blindly off the bottom of the screen and just hope that there will be a platform waiting for you, it's pretty good fun.

Capcom figured that it would have players hooked by the end of Level 3, though, and at that point things start to get cheap and nasty. The pretty graveyards, ice palaces and towns of the early stages give way to featureless caves for the rest of the game, and when you finally hack your way through them you encounter a low trick that would come to characterise the series: just before the final boss you're told that your weapons are inadequate and you must play through the entire game again before you can tackle the climactic battle. With hindsight, that would probably have been the right moment for gamers to assemble a mob, charter a flight to Tokyo and beat Fujiwara-san to death with steel bars.

In trivia news, the Japanese title for the game was *Makaimura*, which apparently means 'Demon World Village'. While the Western versions would chop and change the name, all the Japanese sequels and spin-offs would retain the *Makaimura* label, and the game was converted to almost every home format of the time – mostly very successfully – and subsequently continued to show up on new platforms like the GBA.

The Definitive... Ghosts'N Goblins





» [Arcade] I don't trust that ladder.

1988
Ghouls 'N Ghosts (Arcade)

■ The only arcade sequel to *Ghosts 'N Goblins* took the same formula and turned everything up to the max. The graphics got prettier, the music more lavish, the atmosphere more haunting – the sudden rainstorm in Level 1 is a standout moment for game direction in its era – and the gameplay even harder and more frustratingly unfair. In particular, the middle section of Level 2, with its collapsing bridges completely bereft of any kind of visual or aural warning, is a hatefully bad piece of design, and there are more leaps of faith and unpredictable trial-and-error memory tests than before too.

On the upside, Arthur can now fire vertically, which gives him a bit of a fighting chance, and it perks up a little in the last couple of levels and the forced second runthrough with the super-powerful fireball weapon isn't too much of a chore. But overall *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* sent out a troubling taste of what was to come.

The Japanese title, *Daimakaimura*, incidentally, means 'Great Demon World Village'. In *Ghouls*, Princess Guinevere suddenly became Princess Prin Prin of Hus, and Arthur was clumsily redubbed Knight Arthur. And if you think that's a bad bit of translation, wait until you see the end sequence.

1990
Ghouls 'N Ghosts (Master System)

■ The many home conversions of *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*, of which the near-perfect Mega Drive release is the best, are mostly pretty straight ports, but the Master System hosted what was actually quite a significantly different game. It plays in the same basic way, with more or less the same levels, but donates some strands of DNA to the PSP title that would follow almost 20 years after it.

Some of the treasure chests that Arthur shoots open reveal shops where you can choose between three free items. For example, there are various sets of coloured armour, which have charge attacks as later seen in *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts*, can survive more than one hit intact, and are restored with each new life. The bonus kit helps redress the balance a bit – as does a generally lower level of difficulty enforced by the SMS's technical limitations – and makes the SMS version one of the more enjoyable games in the series.



» [Master System] Phew, that was close.

1991
Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts (SNES)

■ In Japanese, the SNES-exclusive sequel to *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* was called *Chomakaimura*, which translates to 'Extreme Demon World Village', and rarely can a title have been more apt. An order of magnitude harder than its predecessor, *Super GNG* is generally regarded as the hardest game of the entire 16-bit era – and, until recently, probably of all time. If *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* is 8/10 hard, then *Super* is the full monty. It dials down the unfairness a bit, but replaces it with sheer savagery.

But mere savagery wasn't enough for Fujiwara-san. Compounding the horror were the epic scale of the game – seven big levels plus the final boss, compared to just five in vanilla *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* – and the cruelest cut of all: a scarcely believable limit of just five continues. Mega Drive *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*, like the coin-ops, gave you infinite credits, but here you were expected to make it all the way through to the end of the game – twice, as usual – with just 18 lives. What's more, the second time through the levels your weapon, the princess's bracelet, is *worse* than the usual armaments, rather than better. Adding to Arthur's troubles yet further is the loss of his vertical shooting abilities, and his new double-jump power is a necessity rather than a luxury.

Still, *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* is a grand showcase for the power of the SNES, with beautiful and richly coloured graphics and lots of fancy Mode 7 effects. If you have the superhuman persistence and sangfroid to cope with being sent back about five minutes when you die, hundreds of times over, and you're fed up of games that cost 50 quid and only take a day to beat, then *Super GNG* was made for you.

Oh, and if you're *that* hardcore, you'll be pleased to hear that if you somehow manage to beat the game, you get the even harder Professional mode unlocked as a reward. Good luck with that…



» [SNES] This isn't the toughest section in the game, but it's a long and slow one, and if you mess it up you're going all the way back to the start.



1996
Nazomakaimura: Incredible Toons
(PlayStation, Saturn)

■ 'Nazo' seems to mean 'Mystery' in Japanese, so this time we're visiting Mystery Demon World Village, and the full name translates as *'Arthur And Astaroth In Mystery Demon World Village: Incredible Toons'*, though the game was never released in the West.

It's an *Incredible Machine*-type contraption-building puzzler, actually based directly on the PC DOS release *Sid And Al's Incredible Toons*, and each level is a tiny single-screen skit featuring Arthur and/or Astaroth – the big shaggy beast-monster who's the final boss in the first *GNG* – in which you have to achieve one of various goals, using items already on the screen and a few user-placed objects and devices. Sometimes you have to direct the characters to food, sometimes you have to get them killed, sometimes you have to protect them from bombs, and sometimes you have to do all of the above.

Unfortunately, the nature of your objective is obscured by all the Japanese text, but you can usually figure it out, which adds an extra layer of challenge and makes success all the sweeter. It's a fun little game, and accompanied by funky American sitcom and *Scooby-Doo* renditions of classic *GNG* tunes, it's a pleasant way to while away a few hours.

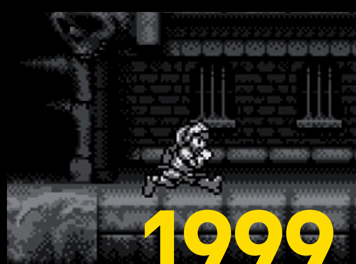


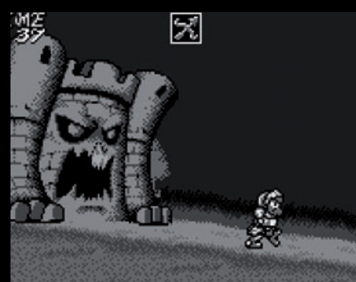
» [PlayStation] If you want to get a feel for *Nazomakaimura*, there's a nice video here showing several stages being completed: **tinyurl.com/nazogng**





» [WonderSwan] He's going to get some terrible chafing sliding down ropes dressed like that.





1999
Makaimura For WonderSwan (WonderSwan)

■ The only traditional-style *GNG* game not created by Tokuro Fujiwara is this little-known black-and-white effort for Bandai's cute but unsuccessful handheld. While its all-new levels copy many of the trademark *GNG* design flaws – in particular a horrible platforming section in Stage 4 that shows off the series' iffy collision detection at its worst – it's also a very inventive and playable game with lots of character and some neat ideas that would be picked up by later sequels.

The WonderSwan game, for example, is the first *GNG* to feature branching paths. Around the halfway point you can choose from two different stages: one an underwater section where Arthur has to go swimming in a suit of armour, and the other a very original vertical level, requiring the WonderSwan to be turned to portrait mode, where he shimmies down a rope and kicks against the wall to sort of abseil past enemies.

There's also the series' most imaginative boss at the end of Stage 2, when Arthur has to fight Ghost Tower: an entire castle, which slides down a hill behind him, spitting rocks and cannonballs at him. In general, this is a really decent effort that can easily hold its head up alongside Fujiwara's *GNG* titles.



2002
Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts (GBA)

■ Though it looks like just another of the lazy SNES ports that plagued the early days of the GBA, GBA *Super GNG*, known as *Chomakaimura R* in Japan, has rather more to offer, mostly in the form of Arrange mode.

It's offered alongside the normal *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* mode, and is a new version of the game with branching routes. If you just stagger to the end of a stage in your underpants, you'll be sent on to the next level as normal, but if you can survive with upgraded armour you'll be able to choose from up to two alternative routes after each stage. The upper path contains the normal *SGNG* levels but harder, with different and/or additional enemies and hazards, but the other one is where the interesting stuff is. The central route through Arrange mode features four brand new levels, themed on stages from *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* and *Ghosts 'N Goblins*. Essentially, it's almost an entire new *GNG* game, except you have to be able to defeat a brutally hard one to be able to play it.

And there's one more thing. If *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* is 8/10 hard and *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* on the SNES is 10/10 hard, then the GBA game is SWEET HOLY MOTHER OF GOD/10 hard. Even on easy, for example, there's an extra fire flower on Stage 1, and the closer zoom makes it tougher to spot many enemies, like the wolves as they leap on you from above. And the Arrange levels are absolutely *monstrously* hard.

If you like psychotically difficult games, the GBA version of *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* is probably the best purchase you'll ever make.

» [GBA] Here's one of the Arrange levels, based on the second stage of *Ghouls*.



The Definitive... Ghosts'N Goblins



2004
Ghouls & Ghosts Online
(Unreleased, PC, PS2, Xbox, GameCube)

■ People often claim the *Maximo* games on the PS2 to be in some way related to *Ghosts & Goblins*, but they're not. However, something looking quite a lot like them almost was – this 3D MMORPG was set in the *GNG* universe and starred Arthur's son. Developer Terazona canned it for unknown reasons some way short of completion, but you can find some videos of it running on YouTube. It was also working on an online head-to-head fighting game called *Ghouls & Ghosts Match Fight*, which was abandoned at a very early stage.



» In a shock development, the "'N' in the title was replaced with a more grammatically correct '&'.





» [Mobile] The first dozen or so stages are easy introductory ones, but it gets more challenging, particularly after Firebrand smuggles the princess further away.

2004
Puzzle Ghosts 'N Goblins (Mobile)

■ The interesting thing about the second puzzle-based game in the series isn't so much that it was the first new *GNG* in five years, but that it marked the switch back to the original Western name for the first time in almost a decade, despite not actually featuring any goblins – the only baddies that show up are the little red demons. It's a really nice little pure puzzler in which Arthur has to negotiate single-screen platform levels made up of blocks, which can only move in one direction, in order to retrieve a key and reach a door and ultimately find his way through dozens of stages to the captured princess. It plays a nice toy-orchestra version of the classic theme tune while you do it, too.



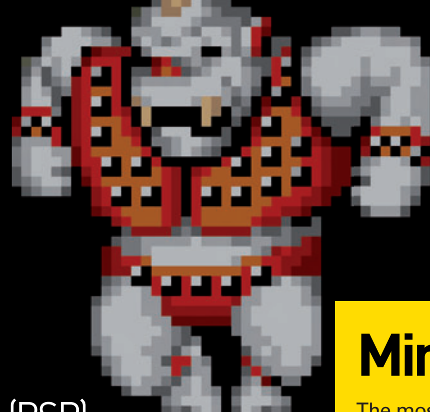
» [PSP] *Ultimate* is a lot more organic-looking than the rest of the series. Or, put another way: icky.

2006
Ultimate Ghosts 'N Goblins (PSP)

■ The *Ghosts 'N Goblins* name made its proper comeback two years after *Puzzle*, with the astonishing *Ultimate GNG* (*Gokumakaimura* in Japan). The astonishing thing about it is that someone evidently thought that *Chomakaimura R* still wasn't insanely difficult enough, and in *UGNG* you rarely get to take so much as a single step without being harassed by a whole pack of constantly respawning baddies from all directions at once. In that regard it's perhaps the outer known limits of hardcore fan service, and even the so-called Novice mode is so absurdly gruelling that most players will struggle to make it through Level 2.

However, it's also the most complicated game in the series, with all manner of items to collect and equip – for example, double-jump boots, which now have to be found rather than being granted from the start – and initially inaccessible areas that have to be replayed multiple times in order to collect all the golden rings, without which you can't 'properly' complete the game. Most of the new elements are confusing and annoying, serving only to get in the way of the action, and a game this frustrating needs extra annoyances like it needs a javelin in its sinuses. Something would have to be done.





2007

Gokumakaimura Kai (PSP)

■ The relative complexity of *Ultimate* wasn't terribly popular with *GNG* fans not used to faffing around with inventory screens and search quests, and Capcom took action the following year with a budget-priced second release of the game that redesigned it to be a little more conventional. ('Kai' more or less translates to 'revision'.) Never released in the West, *Gokumakaimura Kai* makes several very substantial changes.

The most noticeable is that the inventory button is completely gone, with all items now collected and equipped directly in the course of play. Arthur's double-jump is restored from the off to make his life easier, and he can also collect a shield, which can defend him against one enemy projectile attack.

On the downside, our brave knight's armour can no longer resist multiple hits and there are no infinite continues any more, with a total of 56, 30 or even as few as 9 lives available depending on the difficulty setting. You also get sent back to checkpoints when you die, rather than carrying on from where you were killed.

The last big change is that the notion of having to replay individual levels to find golden rings has been dismissed – though you get extra continues for collecting them – and the game returns to the straightforward through-all-the-levels-twice run that fans are used to. The net effect is to make the game slightly harder, but more fun. Basically, *Kai* is no-nonsense old-school *Ghosts 'N Goblins*, and is all the better for it.

Kai includes the original *Gokumakaimura* as an option too, and is actually the definitive release of *UGNG*. So we're really getting stiffed by basically only having half of the game available over here. Boo!



» [PSP] You can tell that this is *Kai* by the absence of Arthur's head/helmets at top left, showing the strength of his armour.

Mini Makaimura Mania

The most fun *GNG* game of all is probably this one. Ghost Trick is a mini-game in the 1999 Neo Geo Pocket Color beat-'em-up *SNK vs Capcom: Match Of The Millennium*. Arthur's job is to collect money bags and treasure chests by jumping across the screen while Red Arremers spring out of pits and try to catch him. It's got the graphics, the music, all the charm and none of the frustration, and it's a highly addictive skill challenge – our top score is 34,900, by the way. It's the best *Ghosts 'N Goblins* ever!



» [Neo Geo Pocket] Wrong way, you idiot.



» [iPhone] The addition of Hard mode is a bit weird, since it's less difficult than the already-existing Boxers mode, where Arthur or Lancelot start off in their pants, just one hit from death.

2008

Ghosts 'N Goblins Gold (Mobile)

■ *GNGG* isn't terribly interesting, being just an extremely cut-down mobile version of the original arcade game, with a mere three worlds. It's really only here to provide a titular link to the iPhone game that came out the following year, so let's move swiftly on to that.







» [Mobile] The most noteworthy feature of *GNGG* is that Arthur has an extra hit point, in the form of what appears to be a set of green long johns between his armour and his pants.

2009

Ghosts 'N Goblins: Gold Knights (iPhone)

■ At the time of writing this piece, the iPhone *GNG* game had just been updated with the addition of a Hard mode, which ought to tell you something about the radical shift in direction that it represents for the series. *GNGGK* takes a huge swerve in the direction of easiness, perhaps partly to compensate for the poor quality of the virtual D-pad controls, which are something of a trial on the iPhone at the best of times, but they're particularly poorly done here, with sluggish imprecision.

Your characters – for the first time in a *GNG* game, you can select from two different ones, trading Arthur's powerful attacks and better armour for Lancelot's ability to Mario-jump on enemies – can take numerous hits without losing their armour or any super powers that they might have accumulated, and you aren't harassed with anything approaching the intensity of *Ultimate*. Throw in unlimited continues and some extremely weak bosses – get the arrow weapon and you can defeat the final boss almost entirely without danger – and you get a game that even average players will beat inside an hour or two. And if you're so amazingly cack-handed that you still can't finish it, you can even buy pointless cheats for real money. Even for three quid, this is a poor capstone for the *GNG* series.

CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAP AS CHIPS



If there's one thing we've learnt about retro gaming, it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you want it to. Granted, a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can be picked up for less than a fiver…

PILOTWINGS

- **SYSTEM:** SNES
- **RELEASED:** 1990
- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO EAD



While it helped make *F-Zero* exhilarating, and was put to tremendous use in *Super Mario World* and *A Link To The Past*, the ultimate demonstration of the rotation and scaling power of the Super Nintendo's Mode 7 graphic mode has always been *Pilotwings*.

Despite nary a colourful-looking hero in sight – we're discounting the flight instructors here – *Pilotwings* is typically Nintendo in every other sense. It's basically Nintendo simply putting its stamp on the flight simulator genre, in the sense that rather than giving players a family of boring grey Airbuses to pilot, usually requiring a silly number of inputs just to get off the runway, it featured a series of unique events, some of which had never been recreated in videogame land before.

The main basis of *Pilotwings* finds the player trying to earn a full complement of flight licences through the earning of points in different aerial challenges. The events on offer begin with a weird, parachuting version of *Bullseye* – sans trivia – and you steering a light plane through some floating green necklaces and landing it without killing yourself, and lead to an insane rocket belt event offset by a very tranquil-feeling hang-gliding section. When you've proven your proficiency in controlling all of these aerial vehicles, the formerly serene game takes a sudden turn for the action-packed and ends with you jumping inside an attack helicopter to save your flying instructors after they're kidnapped by a shadowy organisation – a rival company called Waterwings, no doubt.

Yup, all that hang-gliding and parachuting you've been learning is all leading up to this bizarre *A-Team*-esque rescue mission that finds you piloting a chopper, avoiding bullets fired by anti-aircraft emplacements, and rescuing the very people that helped to get you airborne in the first place – go figure. Still, we guess Nintendo had to think up some way to add a bit of spice to the game's ending. A rescue mission in a hang-glider sounds stupid, the skydiving and light plane sections feel like they've been done to death by this point, and the rocket belt – the weakest of the four classes – is an absolute piglet to manoeuvre and would only mar the finale. So the chopper ending, while ridiculous, does at least bring things to a nice close.

Anyway, once your final mission is complete, you earn your pilot wings and a new challenge mode is opened up. Titled Pilotwings Expert, this mode basically repeats the previous events but includes different weather conditions and hikes up the point quotas that you need to meet too, bringing us to another great aspect of *Pilotwings*: as many of the events have various means to rack up your score, the game offers seemingly endless hours of fun, and plenty of replay value.

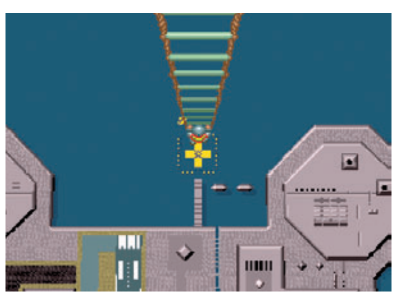
So, there you have it: a lot of game, and plenty of variety for very little money. *Pilotwings* is simply a bargainous retro classic that no Super Nintendo collection should be without.



» [SNES] *Pilotwings* makes excellent use of the Mode 7 function to add a great sense of depth to the game's visuals.



» [SNES] This is a fairly typical result when you first start attempting to actually land your aircraft.



» [SNES] The presentation in *Pilotwings* is sublime. If you suffer from vertigo, though, this game certainly isn't for you.



» [SNES] We were so pleased with this landing that we threw a party. That or we smiled and continued with the next event.

THE MAKING OF... XOR

DEADLY CHICKENS, FLYING HANKIES AND KIT KAT ABUSE. CREATOR PAUL CARRUTHERS TELLS PAUL DRURY THE FISHY TALE BEHIND THE BEEB'S TOUGHEST PUZZLER





IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** LOGOTRON
- » **DEVELOPER:** ASTRAL SOFTWARE
- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **GENRE:** PUZZLER
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £2





■ Retro Gamer: The thing most of us remember about *Xor* is it being incredibly difficult. Why do you hate us so much?

Paul Carruthers: I thought my job was to make it as hard as possible, to frustrate and irritate the player as much as I could. [laughs like an evil genius] I think that's part of the charm of the game, but only to the subset of players that like that kind of challenge. They tend to be spoddy, maths programmer types. Like me, really.

■ RG: So you intended to make it that tough?

PC: We didn't even realise that we were making a game! There was a bunch of us working as research assistants at Loughborough University. Part of our job was to teach maths to engineering undergrads and part was to write educational software for publishers John Wiley. We were based in this Portakabin, sat behind BBC micros, plonking.



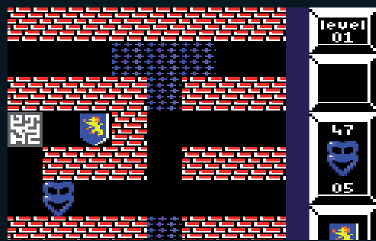
» Paul poses with some of the many faces of *Xor*.

■ **RG: Plonking? Is that a euphemism?**
PC: We had a tea break every hour or so and took it in turns to brew up. We always had Kit Kats. Loads of them. We would wrap the foil around the paper wrapper to make a 'plonker'. When the tea arrived we'd take it in turns to aim a throw at someone else's teacup. If it went in it was called a 'plonk'. In time we acquired a 'superplonker', which was a load of discarded gaffer tape wrapped up into a ball. It was very difficult to plonk, but when it did there was a massive tsunami of tea and I'm sure we lost a couple of BBCs that way.

■ **RG: Fascinating, but what's this got to do with *Xor*?**
PC: Every place of work has its own banter, in-jokes and characters, and *Xor* was just some sprites that represented our office life. Like, one of the lecturers dropped his hanky in the office one day and one of the guys wrapped it around the superplonker, transforming it into 'Halley's Hanky', the ultimate plonking nightmare.

■ **RG: We're still struggling to see the connection…**
PC: So this was the scene: a cup of tea – the player character – moving up, down, left and right, with Kit Kats placed around the screen. If you moved under a Kit Kat it would drop into the tea and end the game. A Halley's Hanky would explode if a Kit Kat dropped onto it from above. We put in disks you had to collect, which represented our work, and tins of Swarfega, which was another running joke. Swarfega was our idea of working-class Vaseline, so any talk of unusual sexual activity would involve a reference to it.

■ **RG: Charming. But what about the chickens?**
PC: I found a message about one of the department lecturers that was scratched into a desk. It simply alleged that he 'f**ks chickens'. Sheer Poetry.



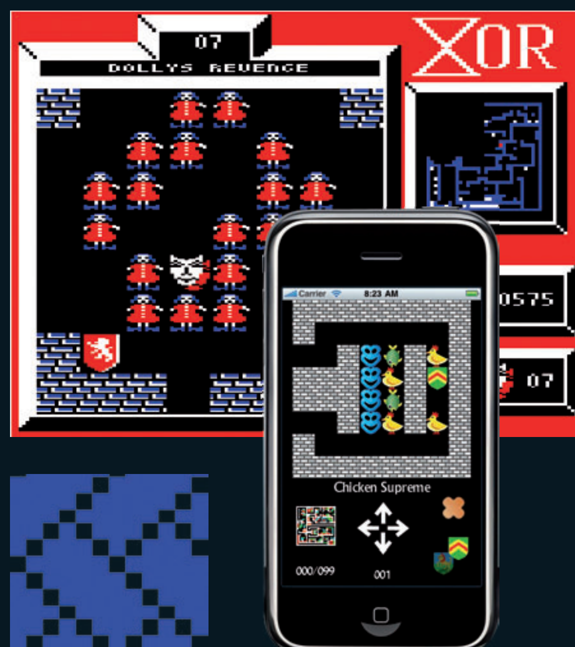
■ **RG: Probably, but at least it's beginning to sound more like the game we got to play.**
PC: For publication we were asked – well… told – to change some of the sprites, so Halley's Hanky became a standard cartoon bomb, the Swarfega became a tin of poison, disks became masks, Kit Kats became chickens, and the cups of tea became the two shields you controlled. The newsagent where we bought Kit Kats was called Da Sousa's, and the doll was based on the rather rotund assistant who was on duty in the mornings when we did the Kit Kat run. The game rules evolved and we somehow managed to find the time to write an editor and create a whole bunch of puzzles.

■ **RG: Yeah, weren't you supposed to be teaching and writing educational software at this point?**
PC: One of the teaching staff was involved with Logotron and heard they were trying to get into games. He knew we were fiddling around and said quietly to us, 'You get it done, they'll publish it.' We didn't have BBCs at home – they were £400! We could only do it in office hours and near the end we were working on it all the time, so we had to have someone posted outside the room in case someone was coming. It sounds awful but I'd turn up to tutorials with no preparation, fielding answers to questions I had no idea about because I'd been working on *Xor* all morning.

■ **RG: And players ended up spending hours poring over your inscrutable puzzles. Did anyone ever complete it and enter the Order of Xor?**
PC: That was the publisher's idea. They thought it was such a hard puzzle that no one would ever solve it. You got a letter after completing each level and if you worked out the mystery word you were supposed to get a certificate, though I never actually saw one. We made it an anagram and some of the letters are wrong. You only find that out on the last level, where there's a 'key' written into the walls of the final map. The answer was supposed to be 'DECEITFUL', but I heard it could also be 'MULTIFACETED'.



» [BBC] Paul and his chums created hundreds of mazes before settling on the final 'super-concentrated' 15.



» Kris Adcock has produced a free iPhone version of *Xor*, and an Android version is also in development.

MORE XOR

As well as an Electron version, *Xor* appeared on the Amstrad, Spectrum and C64 courtesy of one of the original Loughborough Portakabin crew, Stuart Gregg. There was also a version for schools, which included an editor so that pupils could create their own maps and sprites, plus lesson plans.

"Atari sent us some machines and hard drives and I did an ST version, though I never saw a boxed version," recalls Paul. "Then some German lads made their own Amiga version but changed the sprites. What's wrong with fish and chickens, eh?"

Intriguingly, Paul is working on a follow-up of sorts, coming to the PC and iPhone. "The idea has been floating around for ages and it's absorbed ideas from other games I haven't written. I want to carry over the ideas but embed them into something new."

See **www.anthillgames.co.uk** for more.

THE MAKING OF… XOR

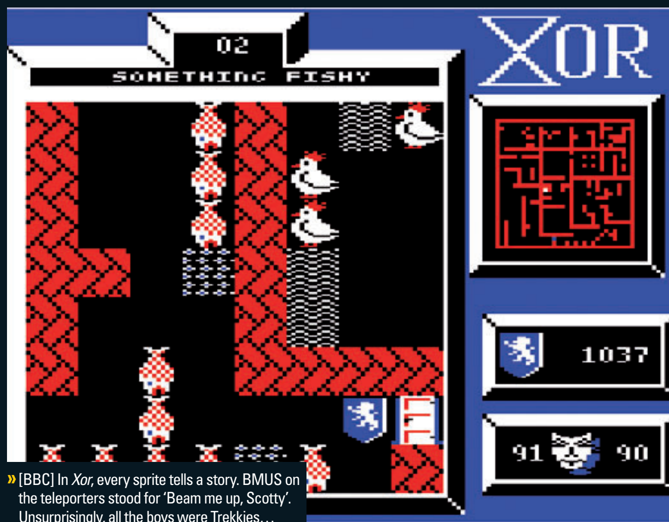
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ARCHIPELAGOS (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: AMIGA, ST, DOS
YEAR: 1989

RESOLUTION 101
SYSTEM: AMIGA, ST, DOS
YEAR: 1989

HORROR ZOMBIES FROM THE CRYPT
SYSTEM: AMIGA, ST, DOS
YEAR: 1990



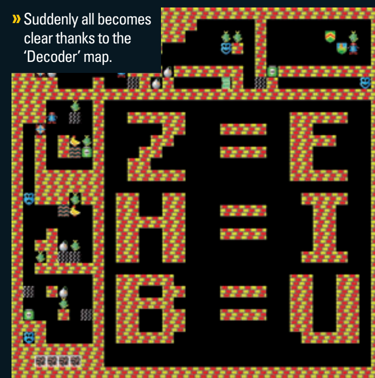


» [BBC] In *Xor*, every sprite tells a story. BMUS on the teleporters stood for 'Beam me up, Scotty'. Unsurprisingly, all the boys were Trekkies…

I love the fact that people are so puzzle-orientated and mental that they would even have a second right answer even more appropriate than the actual one! Classic proof that coincidence is the mother of conspiracy theories. Ask Kris Adcock about it. He runs a fan site.

■ RG: All right, we will. Kris, what's with these multiple mystery words?
Kris Adcock: Well, as I'm sure you know, those who completed the game used the 'Decoder' map to come up with the symbols 'L*UF*T?I*EC*E*D', leading to 'DECEITFUL'. However, one or two people noted that the asterisks and question mark could be seen as wild cards, and so people considered other letters that could be inserted and whether the final word was an anagram. I think it was because they'd sent in the answer 'DECEITFUL' and heard nothing back, so thought it must be wrong. 'MULTIFACETED' ties in with the hint in the instruction manual: "His many faces are scattered through 15 levels." Someone even took this theory to the nth degree and wrote a program that calculated all the suitable words that appeared in a dictionary. Some memorable possibilities included 'UNINFLECTED', 'FUEL-INJECTED', 'CIRCUMFLECTED', 'CENTRIFUGALISED', 'COMPUTERFRIENDLY' and 'DICHLORODIFLUOROMETHANE'.

RG: Uh… *Xor* seems to be a game that attracts a worrying level of obsession. Should we be concerned that you know where we live?
KA: I first played *Xor* on the Beeb when I was about seven years old and the whole atmosphere of the game felt very surreal, claustrophobic… Almost the stuff of nightmares. I think I played



» Suddenly all becomes clear thanks to the 'Decoder' map.

Repton 3 more. Then, in the early Nineties, a chap called John Hedley did a rather smashing conversion of *Xor* for the RISC OS desktop, but as it only appeared on a magazine cover disk, I got in touch and asked him if I could host it on my website before it disappeared into obscurity. It's grown from there. I'll get an email or two a week from different people wanting to know about solutions or different versions. I've just done a version for the iPhone, which readers can download free from the App Store or at **www.danceswithferrets.org/xor**. It's surprising how much interest there is in a 20-year-old game originally pushed as an educational title. Maybe I'll start a webpage for *Granny's Garden* next…

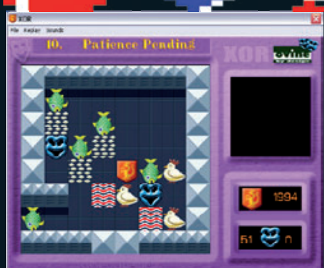
RG: Thanks, Kris. Well, what a nice bloke he is, Paul. *Xor* seems to really mean something to some people…
PC: Yeah, someone from the Royal Society told me how much the game had meant to him and some other bloke told me Tuesday night used to be *Xor* night for him and his mates. A six-pack of beer each, order a takeaway and try and do a level a week! It really clicks with some people.

RG: A certain sort of gamer, perhaps?
PC: I think it's a brilliant game, but only for a small subset of the human race: the uber nerds! If it had been easier it would have faded away in the recesses of time. The fact that it was so hard makes some people remember it with such fondness.

RG: Can we have a *Xor* badge, please?
PC: I haven't actually got one I'm afraid but Ian Saunter from the publishers says he has one somewhere in his garage. He's promised to find it but I want that for myself!

RG: Pity. Oh, we almost forgot. What's with the name?
PC: 'Xor' is a programming term, which stands for 'exclusive or'. It's logic!





» [PC] You can find the *Xor* remake, among many other wonders, at **www.ovine.net**.

ANOTHER FACE OF XOR

We asked those nice chaps Andy and Stu from Ovine by Design about their remake.

"*Xor* has to be one of the hardest challenges I remember from the Beeb, and unfortunately we never completed every level," explained Stu. "We completed another Beeb classic, *Imogen*, and had a mass of emails asking for us to remake *Xor*. Too many times I would give up playing the original thinking, 'How the heck do I complete this level? It's impossible! So how about a remake that allows the game to be replayed and lets a player who can complete it upload the game for everyone else to share?' The remake was born. We tweaked it and changed the rules slightly to make it more logical, in our opinion, to the current gamer. The die-hard fans have pointed it out to us but we feel it hasn't detracted from the game. It's still a rock-hard challenge. It looks simple but it's an addictive challenge that you keep going back to."

You can download the *Xor* remake at **xor.ovine.net**, where you'll find walkthroughs for when you inevitably get stuck…

SAM Coupé

Designed to bridge the gap between 8-bit computers and the 16-bit machines of the future, the SAM Coupé struggled and was swept away on a tide of apathy. Martyn Carroll discovers what went wrong



To call the Coupé a 'Super Spectrum' is tantamount to blasphemy in SAM circles. It's a lazy phrase, after all, based on the fact that one of the computer's four video modes mimicked the idiosyncratic output of the Sinclair machine, thereby allowing the SAM to run Spectrum software. Using the machine as a Spectrum emulator was a bit like shoving it in first gear and gave no indication of the true power under the hood. The SAM's motor was a Z80B processor that ran at almost twice the speed of the Spectrum's Z80A, and it came with a minimum of 256KB memory, with 512KB quickly being standard. Audio was provided by a six-channel stereo sound chip, while the top-end graphics mode had a resolution of 256x192 and could display up to 16 colours from an available palette of 128. Its capabilities were more in line with the Atari ST than the creaky old Speccy, hence the fans' contempt for the 'Super Spectrum' moniker.

Yet the SAM's association with the Spectrum shouldn't really be sniffed at, as it was crucial in marketing the machine to potential owners. Four-page advertising features that appeared in magazines like *Crash* and *Your Sinclair* revealed just why you needed the new machine. "You've been building up your Spectrum software collection for years," ran the ad. "You want a computer with better sound, better graphics, more power – but you don't want to lose your software. The Coupé is the computer for you." It was a sound strategy. The SAM launched in 1989 when the Spectrum hardware was seven years old and really beginning to show its age. All Amstrad had done since acquiring Sinclair was bolt a tape player and disk drive onto the existing 128K model in a bid to prolong the machine's life. It had worked up to a point, yet some publishers were starting to talk about dropping 8-bit support and focusing on the 16-bit formats instead. Spectrum owners looking to upgrade were naturally drawn to the Commodore Amiga, Atari ST or a PC-compatible, so the idea of a powerful new computer in the same league as the 16-bits, yet still able to play all the old Speccy games, was pretty damn persuasive. It also guaranteed that plenty of positive SAM editorial appeared in the Sinclair magazines.

However, there's more to the relationship between the two machines than just software compatibility. If you look closely at the SAM you'll see that the Spectrum's DNA runs right through it. The two men behind it, Alan Miles and Bruce Gordon, both worked for Sinclair Research before founding their own company, Miles Gordon Technology (MGT), in 1986. MGT specialised in designing neat peripherals for the Spectrum, such as the DISCiPLE floppy disk drive, which was presented as the professional alternative to Sinclair's flaky Microdrive storage system. Sales of the DISCiPLE, and its successor the +D, provided MGT with the funding to finance the SAM project.



» [Sam Coupé] The boot-up screen displayed a double rainbow of colours. That's supposed to be lucky, isn't it?

SPECIFICATIONS

Year released: December 1989

Original price: £169.95 at launch

Processor: Zilog Z80B (running at 6MHz)

RAM: 256KB (expandable to 512KB internal / 4MB external)

ROM: 32KB

Onboard language: SAM BASIC

Internal storage: Two 3.5" Ultraslim Citizen floppy disk drives

Display: Maximum resolution 512x192 (Mode 3)

Colours: 128 available

Sound: Philips SAA1099 (six channels, eight octaves)

Associated magazines: *FRED, SAM Prime, SAM Revival*

When designing the SAM hardware, Bruce Gordon was clearly influenced by the work and principles of his former employer. Similar to the ZX81 and Spectrum, the SAM's innards incorporated several off-the-shelf chips and a custom ASIC (Application Specific Integrated Circuit). This design helped reduce the chip count and drive down manufacturing costs, thereby enabling MGT to undercut the competition by a considerable margin. And just as Sinclair Research had done with its computers, the SAM was to be launched in 'core' form, with the idea being that extra memory, storage solutions and other expansions could be bolted on as and when. "With the Coupé, your computer can grow with you," stated the advert. "There are output ports for almost everything we can think of."

The machine's internal programming language could also be traced back to the Spectrum. SAM BASIC was an updated flavour of Beta BASIC, which in turn was an enhanced version of Sinclair BASIC developed by Dr Andrew Wright. Anyone who had learnt to program using Sinclair BASIC would feel immediately at home on the SAM, while the new features and functions ensured that more experienced coders would not be held back. The final link to the past was Flash, the art and animation package that was bundled with the SAM. Developed by Bo Jangeborg, Flash was an update to the popular Artist programs, which he'd written for the Spectrum. Besides introducing a bunch of new drawing tools, Flash was designed to demonstrate the SAM's visual prowess by enabling the user to create graphics in all four of the screen modes.



[Sam Coupé] This image, created using the Flash package, was used to show off the machine's graphics capabilities.

With the hardware and software in place, the SAM sped towards its launch date. In March 1989, *Your Sinclair* magazine revealed that the machine would be available in a couple of months time and would retail for just £150. That's right: the SAM would cost you half the price of a 520ST, and almost a third of the price of an Amiga 500. In terms of performance per pound, it looked to be unrivalled. What's more, it





BRUCE GORDON Q&A

The man who designed the SAM hardware is busy writing software for banks these days, but we managed to grab a few minutes with him to chat about his most famous creation.

Retro Gamer: How much bearing did the Sinclair computers have on the SAM design?
Bruce Gordon: It was in the design concept that we had compatibility with the Spectrum's software. However, it couldn't be another Spectrum, so we had four modes of operation, two of them being Spectrum-compatible. We promised a Spectrum-compatible machine and that's what we did.

RG: What element of the SAM Coupé hardware were you most pleased with?
BG: The ASIC chip. It had all the logic to service the needs of the processor, memory, sound chip, keyboard input and display output. So the hardware structure was simplified. I suppose it was inspired by the Spectrum design, although we put more into the ASIC than Sinclair.

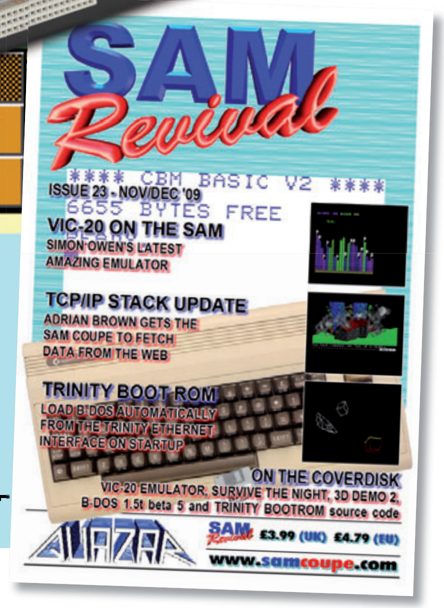
RG: In hindsight, what would you have done differently?
BG: I would have gone to a bigger ASIC to accommodate more control of the display memory so that we could move the display pointers and counters. This would have enabled virtual movement of what the screen was showing relative to the memory.

RG: What were the main lessons you learnt from the whole SAM experience?
BG: It was too late in coming and we should have built a PC system with Spectrum compatibility.

RG: How do you feel about the SAM's legacy, and that there's still a dedicated community supporting the machine?
BG: When we designed the SAM, I put in as many hooks and as much connectivity as possible. I wanted it to be the type of computer that I would have wanted as a young inventor or designer. So I am very pleased and amazed at the fan following that it still has. I think from the outset it had a character of its own.



» [Sam Coupé] The Flash drawing package was the only piece of software initially bundled with the SAM.



was still powered by a Z80, one of the most popular and widely known processors in existence, so there would be no shortage of software written for the machine – and, of course, it would hit the ground running with support for thousands of Spectrum titles. Surely the only way the SAM Coupé could fail was if everything that could possibly go wrong did go wrong. And that's more or less what happened.

The first problem that MGT ran into was a delay in the production of the SAM's custom ASIC by an external supplier. This pushed the launch back to December 1989 and only 200 machines were shipped out before the end of the year, meaning that MGT missed out on the lucrative pre-Christmas period. By the time the machine was available, the retail price had risen to £170. This increase didn't seem to bother the press, who were generally impressed by the SAM and the excellent value for money that it represented. However, it soon became apparent that there was a catch. If you wanted to bring the SAM up to the ST's spec, you'd need to double its memory by purchasing a 256KB upgrade for £40 and add a floppy drive for £90. This whacked up the cost to £300 – the same as an ST and within sight of the mighty Amiga and its £400 '*Batman* Pack' bundle.

To make matters worse, the add-on drives were delayed and they missed the launch by several weeks. And when they did arrive, there was a bug in the DOS, which meant that the bootstrap code didn't automatically execute. Thankfully, the problem was soon patched. One problem that wouldn't go away, however, was the poor compatibility rate with Spectrum software. MGT initially stated that 90 per cent of Spectrum tapes would load, and later reduced this to 75 per cent, while in many users' experience it was actually closer to 50-60 per cent. The main reason was that MGT didn't license the official Spectrum ROM and so the bundled emulator used a rewritten 'skeleton ROM' instead, affecting compatibility.



"If you look closely at the SAM, you'll see that the Spectrum's DNA runs right through it"

Public domain emulators that used the proper Spectrum ROM and offered full compatibility would later appear, but at the time, the SAM pages in Sinclair magazines were filled with letters from disgruntled Spec-chums, listing all of the games that would and wouldn't load. To compound matters, users had to rely on the Spectrum back catalogue, as there was no sign of any dedicated SAM software. At launch, Ocean, US Gold, Domark, MicroProse, Codemasters, Virgin and Activision all said that they would consider supporting the machine if it sold well and the demand was there. US Gold went further than the rest, infamously claiming that porting games to the SAM was simply a case of mashing together Spectrum code and ST graphics. "We're getting a very experienced programmer at Tiertex called Chris Brunning to produce a SAM version of *Strider* for us," US Gold development manager David Baxter told *Your Sinclair*. "Supposedly it'll only take two weeks using our existing Speccy code and ST graphics."

Owners waited with bated breath, but *Strider* never leapt onto the SAM. In fact, it wouldn't be until June 1990, six months after launch, that the first commercial game would arrive in the shape of *Defenders Of The Earth* by Enigma Variations. The gameplay was identical to the Spectrum version, released earlier in the year, although the graphics were much more detailed and colourful. However, any celebrations were short-lived. The story goes that Enigma Variations phoned MGT to announce that the game was finished, only to be greeted by an answerphone message revealing that MGT had gone

COMMUNITY THE BEST SAM WEBSITES



World of SAM

www.worldofsam.org

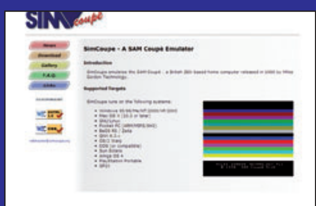
The first place to go for information about SAM Coupé hardware and software, as well as the people behind the products. The site is basically one big SAM wiki, which means that members of the community can contribute and add comments. It replaces the SAM Coupé Scrapbook, which first appeared online in 1994.



Quazar

www.samcoupe.com

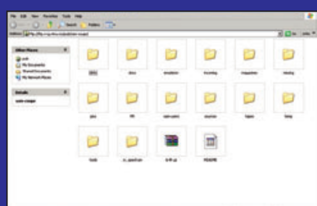
Visit Colin Piggot's Quazar site to buy software and hardware for the SAM, including his flagship Quazar Surround sound card and his new Trinity Ethernet Interface. You can also pick up his SAM games and utilities. The site is home to the *SAM Revival* magazine and you can review the contents of all 23 issues.



SimCoupé Homepage

www.simcoupe.org

Go here to download the latest version of the fantastic SimCoupé emulator. It's available for a dozen different systems and provides close-to-perfect emulation of the SAM. Best of all, it's free to use and comes with everything you need to get it up and running straight away – and even includes some sample games.



NVG FTP Site

ftp.nvg.ntnu.no/pub/sam-coupe/

The web's original SAM resource is an absolute treasure trove if you have the time to dig deep into the various folders. Of particular interest are the magazine collections – including all 82 issues of *FRED* – and the archives of commercial and public domain software, which are available for you to download.



CHRIS WHITE Q&A

We spoke to one of the SAM's most celebrated coders about converting *Prince Of Persia* and *Lemmings* to it.

Retro Gamer: How hard was it to convert *Prince Of Persia*?
Chris White: It was very difficult as there were no conversion tools, so I took screenshots of the PC version and converted them pixel by pixel to graph paper. I then mapped the whole game by playing from start to finish. And yes, I still know the full route! It was a good experience on how to do it the hard way, but not a route I would choose again. It did show Domark that I was capable and led me into console development.

RG: How did it sell?
CW: I believe it was bought by almost every active SAM user. The accounting showed only a couple of hundred difference in SAM sales versus *Prince Of Persia* sales, which I was very happy about.

RG: Was it difficult to make the *Lemmings* port authentic?
CW: DMA gave me the graphic set for the ST version and a spec on how the levels were made, so the SAM version looked the same. The SAM could read the disks directly so I wrote the tools to convert the images and the Lemmings into code format for my system.

RG: How would you sum up the years working on the SAM?
CW: It was very enjoyable. I met some very clever people and I enjoyed working against the odds and doing things above and beyond. I reckon 50 per cent of people who started on the SAM are still in software development. I know I would not be where I am now if I had not done the work on the SAM, so for that I owe Bruce Gordon and Alan Miles a huge thank you.



» This early picture shows the SAM's prototype logic array, which was painstakingly soldered by hand.

into receivership on 12 June 1990. The SAM had failed to sell in sufficient numbers and the company had simply run out of cash.

The initial hardware delay, the emulation problems, and the dearth of dedicated software all played their part in the SAM's stuttering performance. In addition, the Spectrum compatibility proved to be something of a double-edged sword – backwards compatibility meant backwards thinking to some, and the SAM was invariable linked to the Spectrum with no regard for its superior capabilities. Despite the public voting with their wallets, Miles and Gordon were confident that the machine could still be a success, though. On 6 August 1990, the pair announced the formation of SAM Computers Ltd, a new company that would continue to support their machine. SAMCo, as it was known, immediately attempted to reignite interest with two significant moves: it cut the price of the computer with one disk drive to £200 (a saving of £60), and launched its own software arm called Revelation. Under the Revelation banner, SAMCo would publish several top titles, including *Prince Of Persia*, *Manic Miner* and *Astroball*.

The SAM couldn't survive on first-party software alone, however, and while companies like Enigma Variations continued to support the machine, the user base was not large enough to attract the big hitters. This prevented potential owners from choosing the SAM over rival machines that were receiving wider and richer software support. It was a circle, and a vicious one at that. The failure of MGT probably didn't inspire consumer confidence in SAMCo either. On 15 July 1992, after several months of inactivity, the company was liquidated.

This was not the end for the SAM as a commercial concern, however. An outfit called West Coast Computer acquired SAMCo stock and began selling it from 1993 onwards. It even released a updated model called the SAM Elite, which was basically a 512KB machine with a built-in parallel printer interface. By this point, the SAM had been embraced by enthusiasts, who prolonged its life by writing new software and building new hardware. Mainstream coverage of the computer died along with the Spectrum magazines, but dedicated disk-based magazines like *SAM Prime* and *FRED* kept the community up to date with new developments. *FRED* became popular enough to publish its own games and managed to license *Lemmings* from Psygnosis. The scene really began to flourish, and demos that showcased the machine's graphic and sound capabilities were eagerly shared between users.



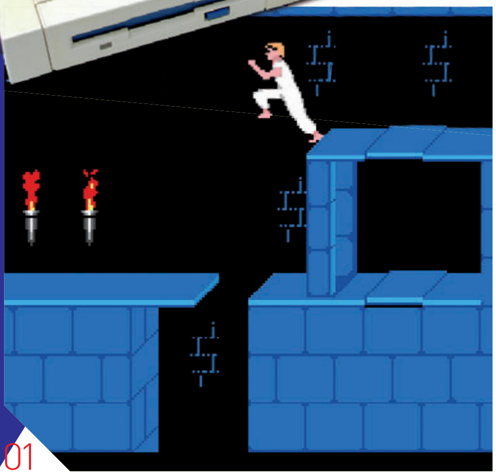
A key development occurred in 1996, when programmer Allan Skillman began work on a SAM emulator for Linux called XCoupé. Simon Owen then took on development duties and the emulator eventually became known as SimCoupé, and is currently available for Windows, OS X, Linux and many other systems.

It's estimated that just 12,000 SAMs were sold in total, but thanks to SimCoupé, anyone who overlooked the machine 20 years ago for whatever reason can now see for themselves what it really has to offer. The SAM certainly wasn't the most important 8-bit computer, and it probably wasn't the most innovative, but in many ways it was the most interesting.

Special thanks to Colin Piggot for his help and generous assistance.



PERFECT TEN



01

PRINCE OF PERSIA

» **RELEASE:** 1991
» **PUBLISHER:** DOMARK/REVELATION
» **DEVELOPER:** CHRIS WHITE
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** ELITE

01 **This was the** first real 'wow' game for the SAM. The preview screenshots looked amazing, yet there was always a worry that the platforming gameplay might be a little sluggish, or that the lifelike character animation might be missing a few too many frames. Thankfully the game lived up to its promise, and looked and played just like the 16-bit versions. As such, if you find playing *Prince of Persia* leads to hair-tearing frustration, the SAM version certainly won't change your mind. But back in 1991, when there were so few decent titles available for the machine, this was a must-have purchase and the closest thing it had to a killer app.

LEMMINGS

» **RELEASE:** 1993
» **PUBLISHER:** FRED PUBLISHING
» **DEVELOPER:** CHRIS WHITE
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** OH NO! MORE LEMMINGS

02 **This was the** conversion SAM fans had been waiting for. It was originally revealed in 1991 that the little green-haired critters would soon be marching onto the machine, and for a fleeting period it looked like a flood of quality games was on its way. This never happened though, and it would take another two years before *Lemmings* would eventually land on the SAM. By this point everyone else was playing the sequel, but all that mattered was that *Lemmings* had finally arrived! And it's a very good conversion too – a little slow, maybe, and with a slightly reduced screen size, but just as much panicked, frustrating fun as the original.



02

MANIC MINER

» **RELEASE:** 1992
» **PUBLISHER:** REVELATION
» **DEVELOPER:** MATTHEW HOLT
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** HUMPHREY

03 **Most Miner Willy** fans will remember talk of *Mattie Goes Mining*, the proposed, improved update of *Manic Miner* for the Commodore 64. The game was sadly never released, but this sublime SAM version more than makes up for its absence. It features the original 20 levels, dressed up with colourful new graphics, plus a further 40 challenging caverns to explore. These 'lower levels' were designed by several people, but they all fit well into Willy's world and introduce some inventive challenges. SAM owners could have loaded up the original Spectrum version, but the additions made this worth the money.

ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF ROBOT MONSTERS

» **RELEASE:** 1991
» **PUBLISHER:** DOMARK
» **DEVELOPER:** ENIGMA VARIATIONS
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** DEFENDERS OF THE EARTH

04 **Enigma Variations created** SAM conversions of *Pipe Mania*, *Klax* and this ace isometric shooter based on the Atari coin-op. Initial impressions were not good, as the intro story sequence was ripped straight from the Spectrum version. But as soon as the game started, brilliant Mode 4 graphics filled the screen and everything was fine. While the screen flipped rather than scrolling (like in the arcade and 16-bit versions), it showed that full-colour isometric games worked a treat on the SAM.

DEFENDER

» **RELEASE:** 1998
» **PUBLISHER:** PERSONA
» **DEVELOPER:** CHRIS PILE
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** PRO-DOS

05 **There's an interesting** story behind this version of the Williams arcade hit. Programmer Chris Pile prepared the game for Persona in 1998, but the publisher's boss died suddenly and it's thought that the game only received a very limited production run. Rather than leave the game stranded in deep space, Pile circulated the game for free and it quickly became a hit with SAM fans. Refreshingly, the game does not feature shiny new graphics and looks almost identical to the arcade original (it's so close that a few people assumed that Pile had actually emulated the coin-op code).



03



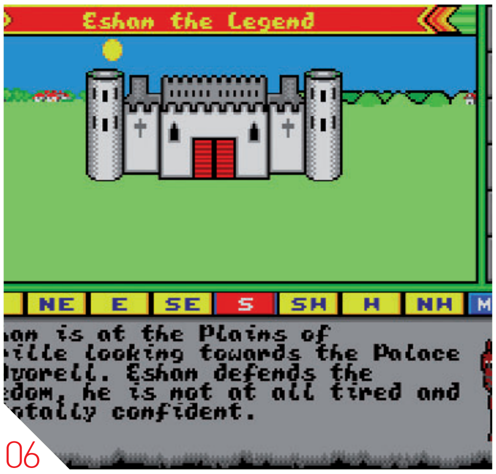
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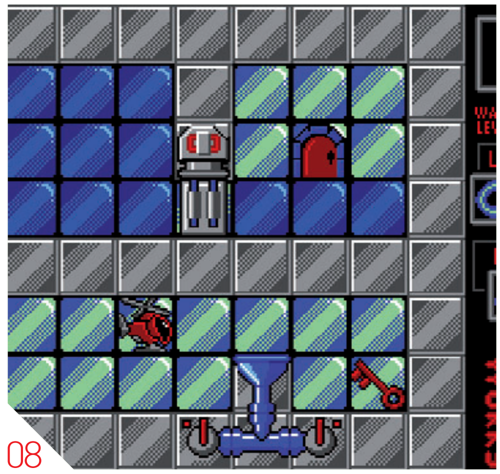
GAMES

Some might say that there were no really great games for the SAM. But they'd be wrong...



06


07


08

LEGEND OF ESHAN

» **RELEASE:** 1994
» **PUBLISHER:** REVELATION
» **DEVELOPER:** JOHN EYRE
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** SAM DICE

06 **The small** SAM userbase meant it wasn't profitable to license existing titles, which led to lots of clones and copies. Here's one example, which leans heavily on Mike Singleton's Spectrum classic *The Lords of Midnight*. The plot features all the usual babblings about Orcs and Witchkings and whatnot, but it's so polished that you can't help but get sucked in. There are 32,000 locations (each depicted with a pleasant Mode 4 screen) and everything is controlled through an excellent icon-driven interface (with mouse support). Those looking for adventure and strategy on the SAM will find plenty to enjoy here.

T'N'T

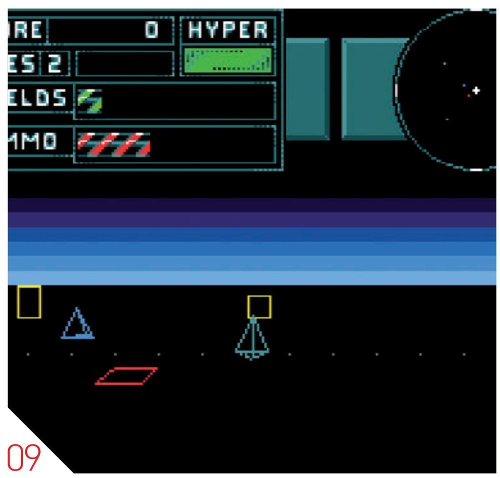
» **RELEASE:** 1995
» **PUBLISHER:** REVELATION
» **DEVELOPER:** MATT ROUND
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** RETROS

07 **The SAM was** home to a couple of popular creation tools – GamesMaster and SCADS – which opened the door to budding designers who weren't versed in the intricacies of Z80 coding. Matt Round used GamesMaster to create a number of quirky arcade games which appeared on the FRED disk magazine, yet *T'N'T* was so good that it was picked up as a commercial release. It's very similar to *Bomb Jack*, only with support for two players (Ted 'n' Tam, hence the title), and is vastly superior to the official *Bomb Jack* sequel that appeared on other 8-bits. This is a fun game that doesn't disappoint.

WATERWORKS

» **RELEASE:** 1993
» **PUBLISHER:** FRED PUBLISHING
» **DEVELOPER:** MARTIN BELL
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** WATERWORKS II

08 **It was a** running gag in Your Sinclair magazine that the SAM was home to far too many puzzle games. *Waterworks* was yet another one, and it arrived quite late in the day, so it was largely overlooked. Which is a shame, because it's a fantastic little game that at first glance looks a lot like *Pipe Mania*, yet with lots of individual touches that really set it apart. Water is both your aid and enemy, as you must use it to open doors and kill enemies, while avoiding drowning yourself. A sequel was released with several new features, but was too difficult to be enjoyable.



09

STRATOSPHERE

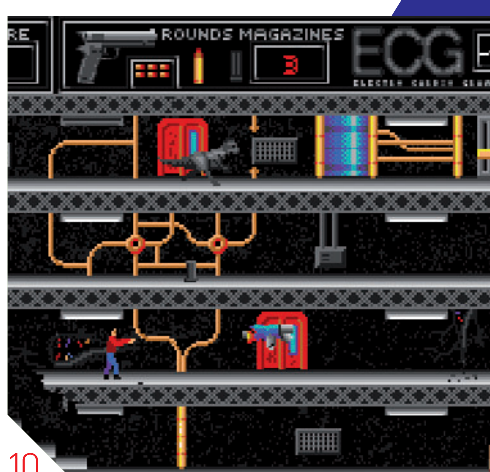
» **RELEASE:** 1997
» **PUBLISHER:** QUAZAR
» **DEVELOPER:** COLIN PIGGOT
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** MONEY BAGS

09 **Quazar's Colin Piggot** spent almost a year writing this four-disk SAM epic to show that the SAM was capable of producing a wire-frame 3D game. And it really works – the graphics move around with speed and smooth fluidity, with the only downside being that the display takes up almost half of the screen. The game plays a lot like *Battlezone* and the aim is to collect flags in each of the 40 levels while battling it out with enemy craft. Stratosphere includes support for the Quazar Surround soundcard, so it loses some of the intended effect when played under emulation. However, if you've got the Quazar kit, it's a must-have title.

INVASION II

» **RELEASE:** 2004
» **PUBLISHER:** QUAZAR
» **DEVELOPER:** WARREN LEE
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** SNIPER FIRE

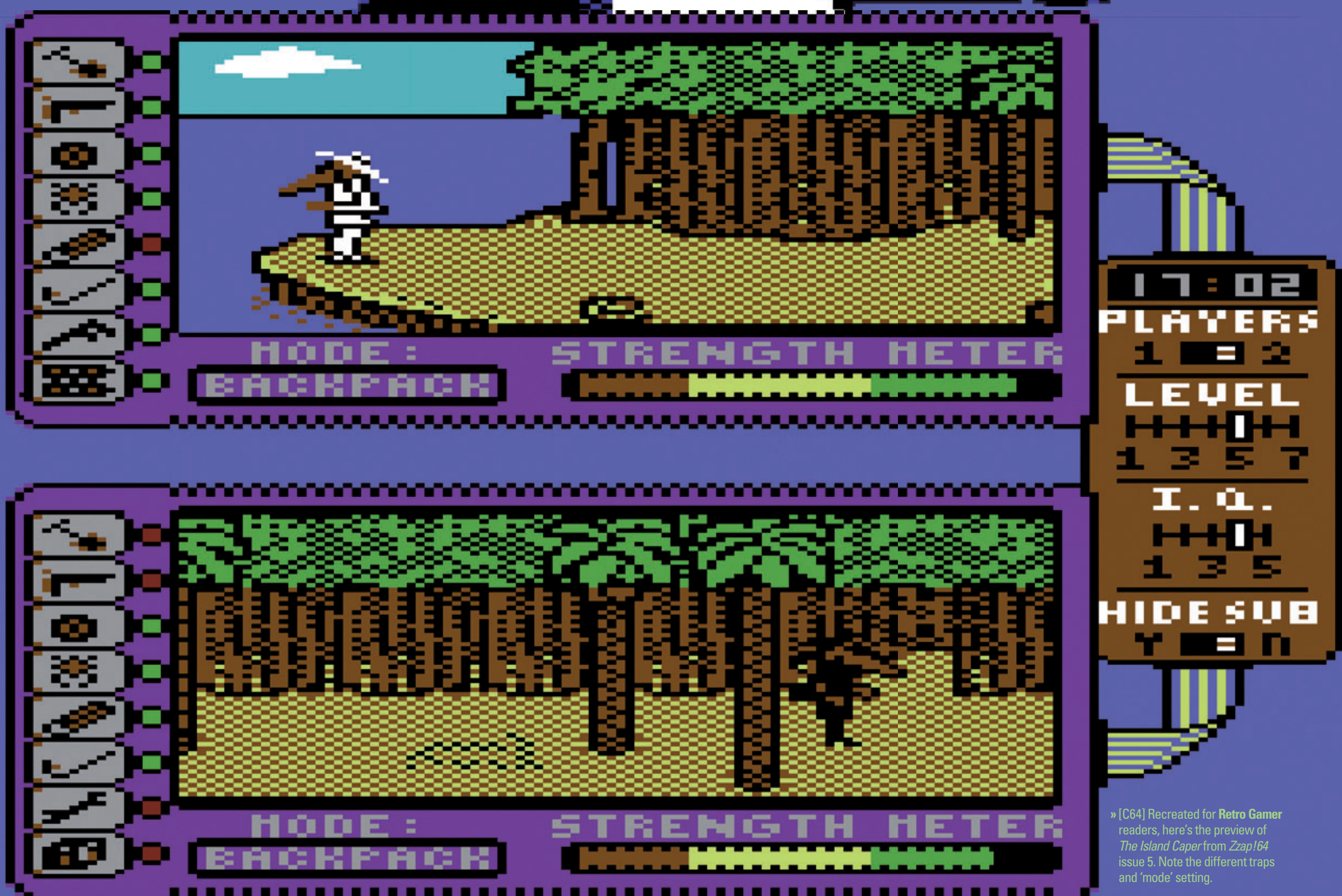
10 **The original *Invasion*** was a simple shoot-'em-up written in GamesMaster that appeared on FRED (issue 58). Several years later, author Warren Lee fired up GamesMaster again and produced this top-quality sequel, which is a platformer rather than a shooter. Clearly inspired by games like *Impossible Mission* and *Flashback*, you have to infiltrate an enemy base while trying to keep your head (which seems to get removed from your shoulders all too often). The graphics are small but detailed, and the quality of the animation is generally excellent. If you fancy your chances against the alien threat, the game was featured exclusively on the coverdisk of SAM Revival issue 10.



10

THE MAKING OF... SPY VS SPY

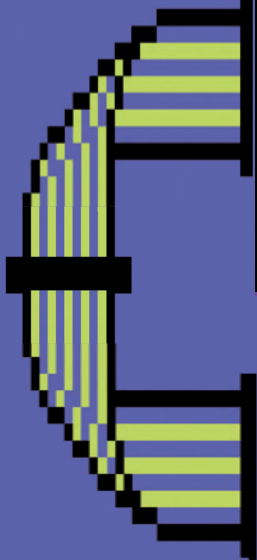




» [C64] Recreated for **Retro Gamer** readers, here's the preview of *The Island Caper* from *Zzap!64* issue 5. Note the different traps and 'mode' setting.



Along with a smattering of cartoon violence, Spy vs Spy brought many innovations to the small screen, driving forward games with split-screen two-player modes and interactive traps. Top Retro Gamer agent Craig Grannell swaps coded messages with Spy vs Spy's designer Richard Spitalny to reveal classified secrets about the games' creation



In an era of online deathmatches and local split-screen action, it's easy to forget how revolutionary First Star Software's *Spy vs Spy* was in 1984. The game transplanted warring cartoon spies from *Mad* magazine to the C64 and Apple II. The spies explore an embassy, searching for a passport, money, a key and top-secret plans, setting deadly – and funny – traps along the way, and aim to beat the other guy to the exit.

An early example of a successful licence, the game offers rare features for the time: AI that behaves like a human player; protagonists that are detailed cartoon figures, full of character and charm; and split-screen action. And while *Spy vs Spy* wasn't the first split-screen videogame – it was beaten, for example, by Atari's 1980 racer *Dragster* – it propelled the technique forward, becoming a benchmark for future titles.

Spy vs Spy began life in a brainstorming session in 1983, shortly after half of First Star Software was sold to Warner Software. "Something that attracted me about investment from Warner was the company's huge catalogue of IP," recalls First Star founder Richard Spitalny. *Superman*, *Wonder Woman* and *Spy vs Spy* were deemed suitable properties to turn into videogames, and the *Mad* magazine spies excited Richard most. He saw potential in the strip's head-to-head nature, cartoon slapstick violence, the creative contraptions that the spies used to battle each other, and each story ending in a pay-off.

Spy vs Spy comics, rather than videogames, were the only real influence during development. "We created the game from a blank page up, asking ourselves what made *Spy vs Spy* what it was – we didn't want a mediocre me-too game with a brand slapped on," says Richard. "It couldn't be turn-based – it was essential that you could play against the computer or another player in real-time, because that was the soul of the comic. Even though the comic was presented in panels, it was implied that both spies were working simultaneously to bring the other down."

These ideas evolved into split-screen and simultaneous play – 'Simulvision' and 'Simulplay', respectively. As noted, the crazy traps and inventions that the spies used to thwart each other's efforts were also important, and were duly added. "The Trapulator, along with Simulvision and Simulplay, replicated the surprises and pay-offs of the comic strip's last frame, although you get them throughout the game," says Richard, "and they provided the sense that you were creating an ever-changing landscape, by deciding which trap or remedy you were using at any given time."

I spy

Throughout the design process, Richard ensured that all gamers were catered for. In basic terms, Simulvision enables two players to play on a single screen, simultaneously, and novices are assisted with 'breadcrumb' arrows so steps can be retraced; but it also gives advanced players an extra level of strategy, by spying on an opponent, remembering trap locations and using remedies accordingly, such as an umbrella to avoid getting hit by electrified water that you know is in a bucket above a door.

"Simulvision provided strategic options that at the time hadn't been available in games," claims Richard. "You could sit back, watch the other spy collect something you needed, call up the map, and switch from 'collecting' mode to 'hunting him down' mode. Or if the other player was about to win, you could dart to the exit and, in the last few seconds, undo his game, turn it around and win."

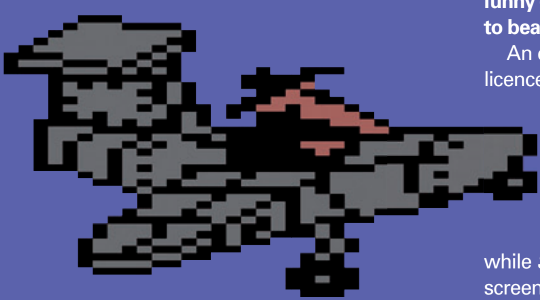
The environment in which the spies battle neatly contrasts the mundane and the comic, comprising both the obvious and the innovative. "I came up with the embassy location because of the spies – it wasn't very inspired," admits Richard. "What was more inspired was the simultaneous play, the hand-to-hand combat and the Trapulator."

The Trapulator is undoubtedly *Spy vs Spy*'s most memorable feature: five selectable booby traps for placement within the maze-like embassy. Although the comic strip's contraptions are elaborate, Richard realised that such complexity wouldn't



IN THE KNOW

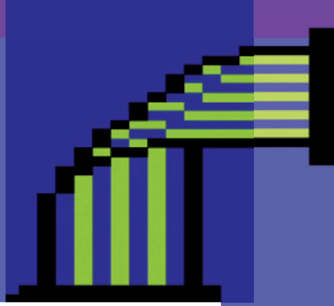
- **» PUBLISHER:** FIRST STAR SOFTWARE
- **» DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **» PLATFORM:** C64.
  SPY VS SPY CONVERTED TO: AMIGA, AMSTRAD CPC, APPLE II, ATARI 8-BIT, ATARI ST, BBC MICRO, C16/PLUS4, GAME BOY, GAME BOY COLOR, MSX, NES, SEGA MASTER SYSTEM, SHARP X1, ZX SPECTRUM
  SPY VS SPY: THE ISLAND CAPER CONVERTED TO: AMIGA, AMSTRAD CPC, APPLE II, ATARI 8-BIT, ATARI ST, MSX, ZX SPECTRUM
  SPY VS SPY III: ARCTIC ANTICS CONVERTED TO: AMIGA, AMSTRAD CPC, APPLE II, ATARI 8-BIT, ATARI ST, IBM PC, ZX SPECTRUM
- **» RELEASED:** 1984 (SPY VS SPY, C64); 1985 (SPY VS SPY II, C64); 1987 (SPY VS SPY III, C64).
- **» GENRE:** ARCADE
- **» EXPECT TO PAY:** £1 PER GAME





» [C64] Black Spy is engulfed in a comic explosion, causing White Spy to cackle menacingly. The cad…

THE SPY VS SPY TRILOGY



work in an arcade game. "We decided that we didn't want to force players to build traps – just pick one from a selection," says Richard. "But although we thought traps should be easy to implement, we wanted some interactivity. So in the game, you select the bucket of electrified water, go to a door, and place the trap. You don't just click a bucket."

In designing the traps, Richard says the main consideration was that they were: "Funny, visual and effective, but only violent in a comic book way. So with the water over the door, a spy gets electrocuted in cartoon fashion and flutters off to heaven as an angel. This was influenced by guidelines I'd set for myself – I had young daughters and never wanted to make violent games".



Many *Spy vs Spy* concepts were new to videogames and therefore drove technical firsts, but Richard's design solely concentrated on gameplay. "Part of what's served me well in my years in the business is that I'm not an engineer – I come to game design unencumbered with limitations

> "It was essential to play in real-time, because that was the soul of the comic"
>
> RICHARD SPITALNY ON HOW THE COMIC INFLUENCED THE GAMEPLAY

that I might otherwise have if trying to code something." Implementation fell to Mike Riedel, who Richard says was "amazing", especially with the game's one-player mode AI.

"We had conversations and I said I didn't want the AI to know where things were and then algorithms be used to dumb it down. I wanted the AI to explore, learn and make mistakes the way a human does," recalls Richard. "Subsequent iterations of the AI were much better – I felt like I was playing another human. Mike did a phenomenal job, and I think the AI even holds up well today."

Mike was also responsible for the game's graphics and animation, which are full of personality and slapstick moments, turning the comic's static characters into low-resolution Warner Bros-style interactive cartoons. "My input was to ensure that a fan of the comic got what they expected, and so the game had to look like *Spy vs Spy*," says Richard. "My only other contribution was hovering over Mike and reminding him that I wanted my daughters to be able to play the game, so it had to be cartoony, funny and not violent. Again, Mike did a wonderful job in all respects. You go back all those years and it's amazing – the colours, the animation, the fluidity with things not slowing down, real-time maps… He was brilliant."

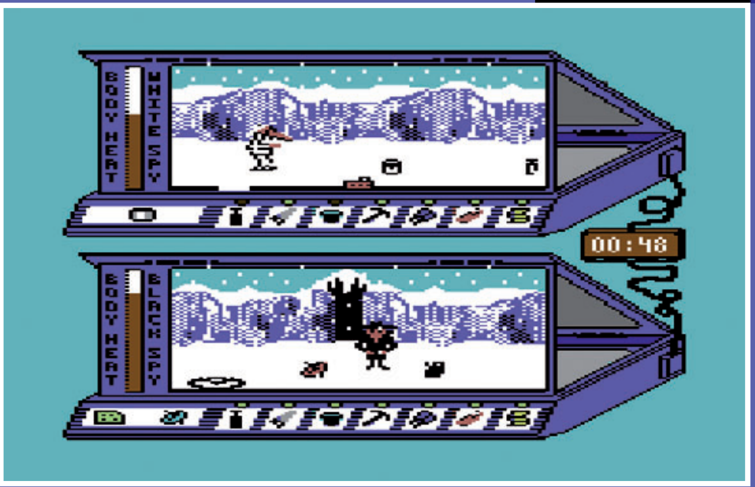
On release, *Spy vs Spy* was a huge success, eventually being ported to many other platforms, and Richard wouldn't change a thing – even the aforementioned and regularly criticised last-screen 'mugging', where a spy can lay in wait, off his opponent, nick his goodies, and win the game: "It's unfair, because a spy gets undone in the last second, but that's true to the pay-off in the comic's final frame. At least in the game you can see what the other guy's up to and that he's lying in wait!"

The Island Caper

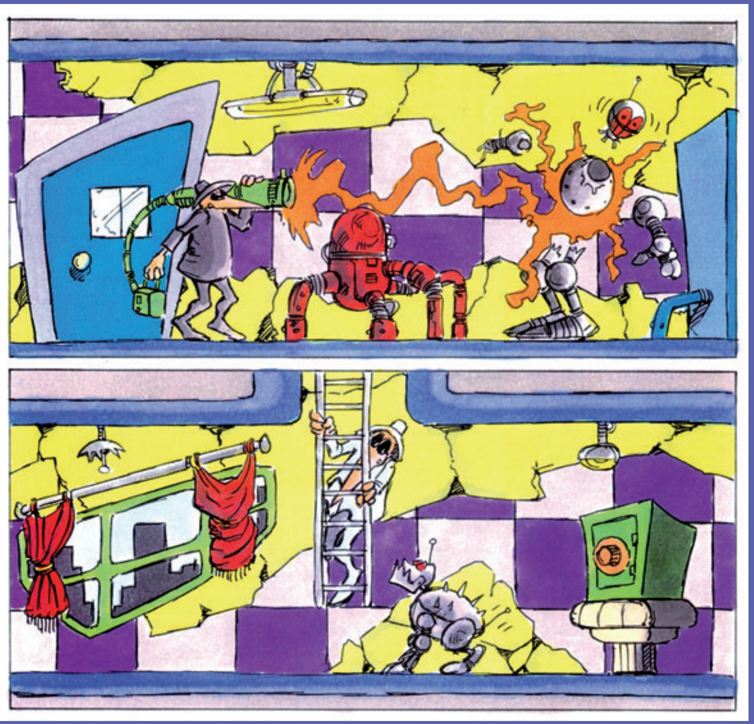
With *Spy vs Spy* a big success, a sequel was inevitable. "We knew that if we did it right and the graphics, technology and design advanced, we'd do well again," says Richard. Although sequels require building on what people liked before, Richard didn't want 'embassy revisited'. Instead, he transported the spies to a tropical island, the aim being to find and assemble a three-part warhead before escaping in a submarine. "The environment was richer, with better graphics. You didn't get that forced perspective from the maze-like embassy, seeing three out of four walls. Instead, the game is less claustrophobic, with more freedom – there's an openness and expansive feeling."

Along with improved graphics – sunny beaches, palm tree groves, and deadly shark-infested water – the island's open setting also led to open-form gameplay. *Spy vs Spy*'s traps have a slightly contrived aspect that you just don't find in the sequel, where traps feel natural and are mostly environmentally oriented: vines used for snaring a spy and hanging them from a tree; coconuts turned into explosives by filling them with petrol from a plane wreck; holes dug for unwary spies to fall into. "Another difference with *The Island Caper* is that you dig a hole wherever you want, but in the first game traps have to be set in specific places – there's less freedom. During development, the island also provided scope for natural hazards that enriched the gaming experience, such as quicksand. I liked how we made it so you twirl the joystick to escape – it's reminiscent of Epyx sports games, where you physically work to do something on screen that's physical."

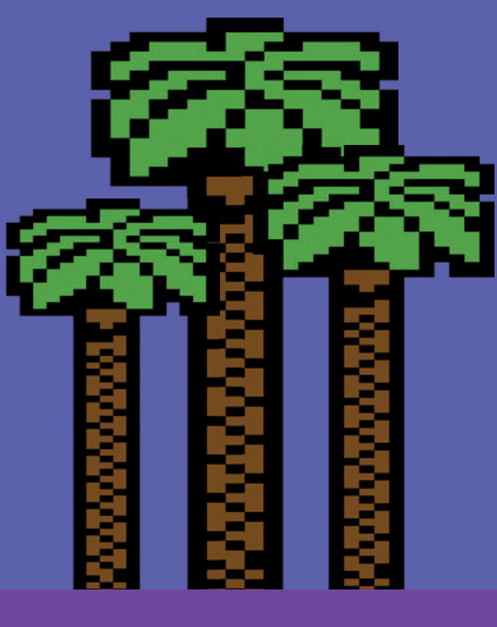
With Richard on the phone, we take the opportunity to clear up a mystery: what happened to the 'extra' items – crab, saw, crowbar, wrench – and 'backpack mode' featured in



» [C64] Spend too long in the Arctic and it starts to snow, making it hard going for both spies.



» Concept art from *Spy vs Spy vs Spy*, an unsuccessful attempt to get the series onto the Sega Mega Drive.





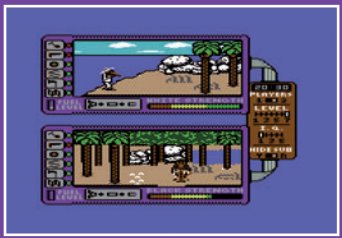
SPY GAMES

SPY VS SPY



The first *Spy vs Spy* game is set in a flip-screen pseudo-3D embassy, with both spies laying booby traps and searching for secret plans before fleeing by plane. The game is perhaps the earliest split-screen effort that enables players to disengage or fight hand-to-hand upon meeting.

SPY VS SPY: THE ISLAND CAPER



The second game tasks the spies with retrieving a warhead before an active volcano engulfs the island in lava. Instead of rooms, each island comprises a number of large scrolling areas. The game also introduces to the series environmental factors as hazards and trap components.

SPY VS SPY III: ARCTIC ANTICS



Similar to *The Island Caper, Arctic Antics* has a scrolling landscape and environmental factors to take into account. The aim is to locate and launch a rocket, necessitating the collection of a selection of required components, including a punch card, gyroscope and fuel capsule, and traps include ice slicks and holes, booby-trapped icicles and buried TNT.

SPY VS SPY



This 2005 Xbox and PS2 release was the first *Spy vs Spy* game to be developed without First Star Software's direct involvement and offers a storyline mode, a 'classic version' that's akin to the original *Spy vs Spy* – albeit in 3D – and multiplayer deathmatches. However, the single-player experience is tedious, and the game lacks the charm and playability of the 8-bit titles, leading to a disappointing critical reception.





DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ASTRO CHASE
SYSTEM: ATARI 8-BIT, C64
YEAR: 1982

BOULDER DASH [PICTURED]
SYSTEM: ATARI 8-BIT, AND THEN ALMOST EVERY PLATFORM KNOWN TO MAN
YEAR: 1984–2008

FLIP & FLOP
SYSTEM: ATARI 8-BIT, C64
YEAR: 1984



Zzap!64 issue 5's preview? Richard thumbs through his design document, which reveals plenty – there's talk of spies competing for treasure maps; a compass and key to find and disarm the warhead; lanterns and caves; groves of coconut trees showering coconuts "à la *Space Invaders*"; wind, rain and cliffs. Crabs and snakes also make an appearance as hazards that injure spies and as components for traps, explaining the *Zzap!64* screenshots, and there are notes about spies catapulting coconut bombs using bent-over palm trees, and deserted huts with trap-building components.

"So the original vision was more 'Rube Goldberg-esque', with booby-trap construction a part of the game," says Richard. We proffer that subsequent simplification was perhaps down to the game's nature: catapulting explosive coconuts sounds fun, but not if you'd have to wait ten minutes for an opponent to get into the firing line. "That's a good point, and I'm sure revisions were down to technical limitations [and] things not being fun or being too fiddly," thinks Richard. "And while I would have liked to include some of those things in *The Island Caper*, I don't think the game suffers without them."

Arctic Antics

Strong sales for *The Island Caper* resulted in another sequel, but rather than securing a hat-trick, *Arctic Antics* was closer to an own-goal. The game transplants the battling spies to snowier climes, with booby traps based around snow and ice. The game feels like a blizzard has hit *The Island Caper*, removing colour, vibrancy, innovation and fun.

Richard admits that *Arctic Antics* was beset with problems from the start. For various reasons, Mike Riedel quit the project and Jim Nangano took over. "There are always issues in inheriting someone else's code, and we had release date pressure, so ended up with a less perfect game," says Richard, adding candidly: "And there's no question: *Arctic Antics* didn't have much innovation to it."

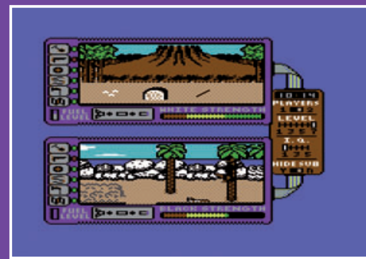
Richard nonetheless doesn't consider the game to be without positives: "The snowball fights take the spies to the point where they have hand-to-hand combat, but from a distance. I'd have liked a better interface, but there are moments when you feel like you're in a real snowball fight. I also like the igloos, where you go inside and warm yourself by a fire to get body strength back."

We ask if the lack of growth between *The Island Caper* and *Arctic Antics* was solely down to a change of programmer, or if the original design was also to blame. Reading through the design documents, Richard concedes that "there aren't many innovative things", and, unlike *The Island Caper*, only a few features missed the cut, notably wandering wildlife – polar bears and presumably

THE SPY VS SPY TRILOGY



Death is not the end (except when it is)

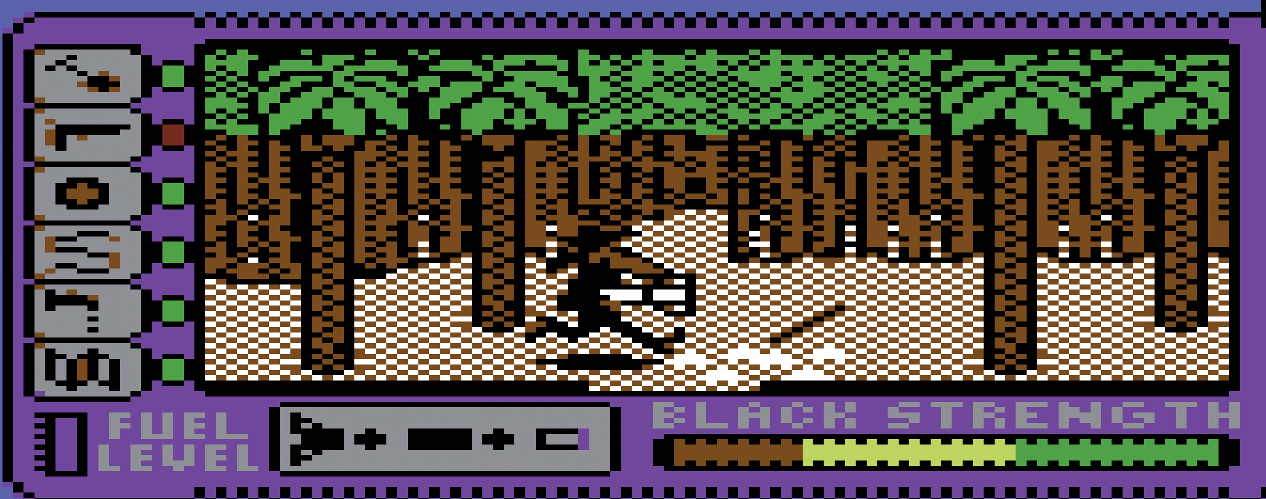


As noted elsewhere, Richard was determined that *Spy vs Spy* would be a game that kids could play, devoid of realistic violence. Therefore, spies in the first game don't meet with a gruesome end – instead, they become angels that flutter upwards, and subsequently return to life, albeit with a time penalty.

In the sequels, death is rather more permanent: a tombstone marking a final resting place in *The Island Caper*, and a block of ice when a spy freezes to death in *Arctic Antics*. "We decided to make the sequels more akin to the comic," says Richard. "So whereas the penalty in the first game is disappearing temporarily, you must be careful in the sequels to not die, otherwise the best you can hope for is that the opponent also fails."

Richard thinks that this decision was partly down to the addition of natural hazards: "Things like quicksand, the sea, shark attacks, blizzards and thin ice – players have to avoid them, in order for the hazards to impact on the gameplay and add to the fun and challenge, hence the monitoring of one's health."







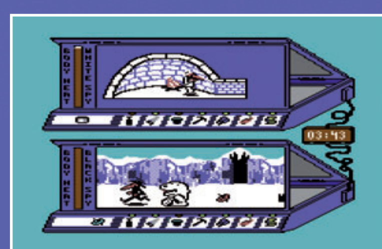
very lost penguins – and the utilisation of cliffs to dump snow on your opponent. "I think it was more that we didn't have the time we needed," says Richard. "The interface, animation and AI aren't as good and don't feel as realistic; you feel more detached from your character than in the previous games." In hindsight, he also reckons that the Arctic location was a mistake: "There's a fundamental flaw in picking such a monochromatic environment: you don't get the beautiful variation in colour, texture and views that you do on the tropical island. I have to take responsibility for that… I knew it was coming, but didn't think it'd be an issue. Perhaps if everything else had been right, the environment would have been fine. But with the game only being part of what it should have been, you're always subliminally thinking something else is lacking – and that's colour."

Arctic Antics ends with the successful spy blasting off into space, in a rocket with 'spies in space' emblazoned on its side. C64 publications at the time waxed lyrical about a fourth *Spy vs Spy* game, set in a space station, with spies battling zero-gravity, aliens and each other, but nothing ever arrived. "It wasn't intended as vapourware, but the economy was shaky and we couldn't take on another project," explains Richard. "We had discussions: the spies had been in an embassy, on a tropical island, and to the Arctic, so where should they go next? We thought space would be cool, possibly setting the game on several planets, which would be great visually, but that's as far as it got."

Spy vs Spy vs Spy

The spies never made it to space, but Richard, armed with yet another 30-page design document with numerous notes and images attached, reveals that a Mega Drive game was planned in the early Nineties. *Spy vs Spy vs Spy* would have introduced the female spy – the Grey Spy in the comic, garbed red in the game – and her droid army. The document reveals gameplay more complex than the 8-bit efforts, but not entirely divorced from it. In true console fashion, there's an overriding objective – "stay alive long enough to find and destroy the doomsday bomb and beat the Red Spy in the game's final encounter" – with several 'worlds' you warp between, and boss battles. But the concept art shows a familiar split-screen layout, and the design document talks about traps and remedies integral to the game.

The spies could also still meet and beat the living daylights out of each other – again in cartoon fashion, albeit with more moves – and should they meet during a boss battle, the fight would become a full-screen free-for-all. "So the game wouldn't have just been two players against each other, but also a quest to build up arms and trap-making ability, advancing



» [C64] Try to board the rocket before collecting the relevant parts and you're ejected by an angry polar bear.



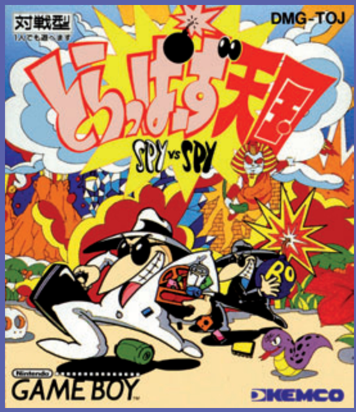
» [C64] Try to sneak onto the plane without your documentation and the airport security guard sends you flying in a rather different way.

through worlds to the ultimate goal of thwarting the Red Spy," says Richard. "And the buildings would have been multi-levelled, with ladders, poles and pipes to enable you to inch over lava pits. It was still funny, but more military and infiltration-based. We had a team doing prototype code and had hoped to bring it to a publisher, and work with them and *Mad* magazine. It would have been great."

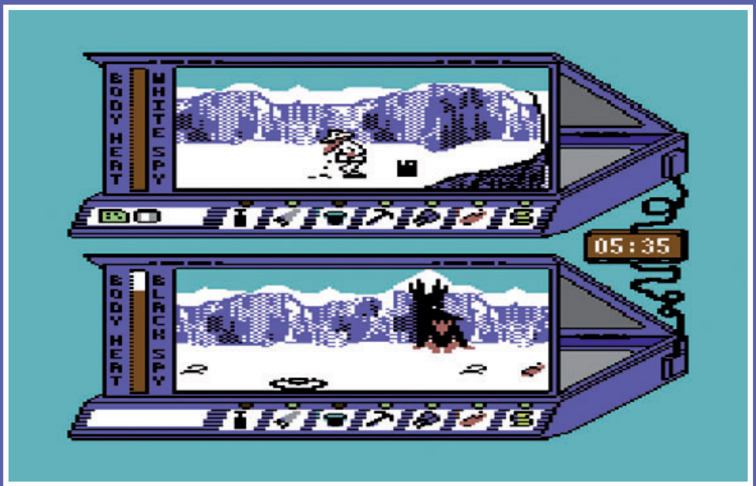
In the end, it was 2005 before another *Spy vs Spy* game appeared. Published by Global Star for the Xbox and PlayStation 2, it was memorably headed in David Clayman's IGN review: "A classic game gets a downgrade." Deathmatches akin to the classic series were included, but a bland 'storyline' mode was front and centre. "Our involvement was minimal," recalls Richard. "The IP owners told us that the game was happening and the developer was interested in using elements from our games. They worked out something that would be to everyone's satisfaction, since the developer wasn't entirely able to break away from the metaphors we'd created and didn't want to be restricted by avoiding them. But is that involvement? Not really."

Richard says the game was a "disappointment", but reckons that the property could return, utilising current platforms and technologies: "Imagine the first two *Spy vs Spy* games on the iPhone or Xbox Live Arcade. There are things you can do over Wi-Fi and the web that would enhance the game, and it's screaming to be done." While First Star remains in contact with relevant players, only Richard seems excited by the prospect of resurrecting *Spy vs Spy*, thereby making remakes and updates unlikely. "What we kick around here is that we own everything apart from the name and spy likenesses. We could bring out a game – let's call it *Guy vs Guy*, although I wouldn't call it that [laughs] – with elements, plots and environments we created," he says. "But I'd much rather do it as *Spy vs Spy*. As an eternal optimist, I'm still hoping that will happen someday."

» Several years after its C64 release, *Spy vs Spy* was still being remade for other platforms, such as the depicted Game Boy version.



> **"Space would be cool, setting the game on several planets, but that's as far as it got"**
> RICHARD GIVES US A GLIMPSE OF WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN



» [C64] As White Spy pours water to make an ice slick, Black Spy gets knocked out cold by booby-trapped icicles.

SPIES LIKE US

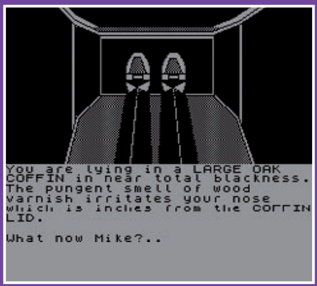
Other retro games with espionage in mind – and the word 'spy' in the title

SPY HUNTER



Bally Midway's 1983 overhead driving game finds you taking the role of a spy who's not terribly concerned with all that 'undercover' guff, instead blowing up as many enemies as possible – sometimes with the aid of additional arms provided by a weapons van – on an inexplicably long and winding road.

SPY TREK



Americana's adventure showed up in 1986. As Mike the spy, you search Europe for plans that an agent hid before carelessly getting himself killed. Oddly, the game starts with you in a coffin. It has the usual limitations of a GAC creation, but it's an enjoyable enough way to spend a rainy Sunday.

SLY SPY



Also known as *Secret Agent* and *Sly Spy: Secret Agent*, this 1989 arcade offering suggests that the best way to be a spy is to shoot as many bad guys as possible – or kick them in the face if you run out of bullets. Sometimes, killing must also be done underwater, or while riding motorbikes at crazy speeds.

THE SPY WHO LOVED ME



Depending on your chosen platform, this *James Bond* game is either a rubbish *Spy Hunter* game glued to *Operation Wolf* (16-bit) or just a rubbish *Spy Hunter* game (8-bit). It doesn't compare well to Domark's earlier *James Bond* effort, *Licence To Kill*, but that didn't have 'Spy' in the title, so we ignored it.

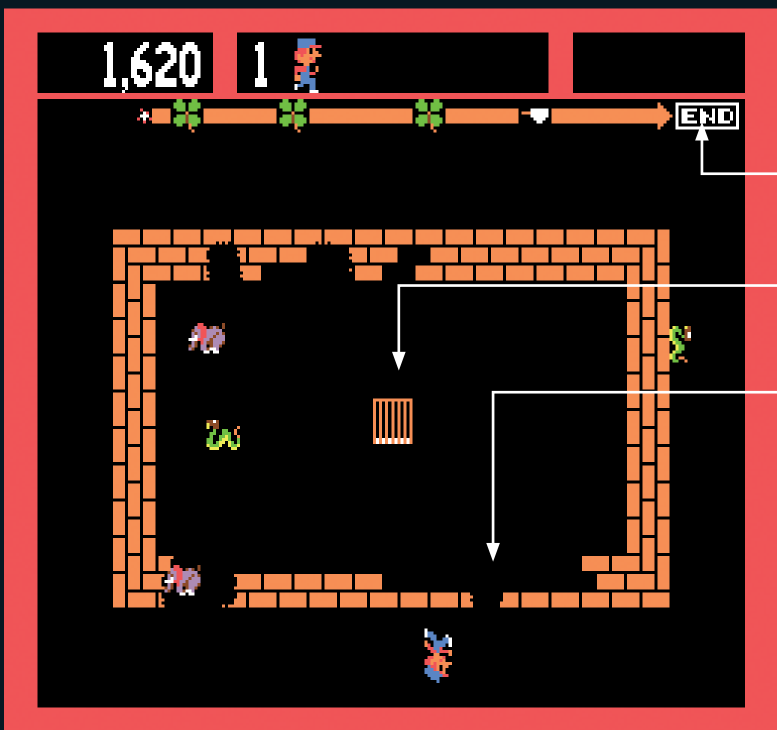
THE SUPER SPY



Here's another game suggesting that the best way to infiltrate a deadly terrorist network is to shoot everyone with a gun, rather than sneaking about and being spy-like. The game plays like a mutant hybrid of *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Double Dragon* and oddly thinks that knives rapidly rust when you get all stabby.

THE UNCOVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home

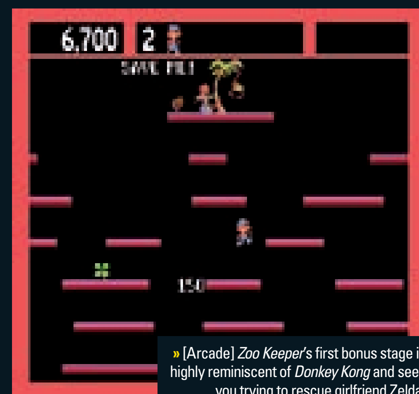


In Depth

» You need to survive until the timer reaches here. It's easier said than done though, especially on *Zoo Keeper*'s later stages.

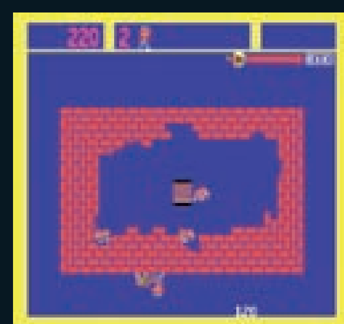
» This is your enclosure area. Keep as many animals in here as possible for big bonus points.

» When animals hit walls they'll leave gaps. Fix them as quickly as possible by running over them.



» [Arcade] *Zoo Keeper*'s first bonus stage is highly reminiscent of *Donkey Kong* and sees you trying to rescue girlfriend Zelda.





ZOO KEEPER

■ **Developer:** Taito America ■ **Year Released:** 1982 ■ **Genre:** Maze/Platformer

■ **Not to be confused with the popular match-three game by Robot Communications, *Zoo Keeper* is an utterly superb arcade game that for some reason never received a home release on the popular consoles and computers of the time.**

Taking on the role of the titular animal keeper, your aim was simple: run around a brick enclosure and stop the contained animals from escaping. The trapped creatures will constantly batter the walls in an attempt to get out and will run rampant if they break free of their cage. Fortunately, Zeke the zoo keeper is a dab hand at fixing holes, and simply running over an exposed area will re-cover the structure with a thin layer of brick.

Any animals that manage to escape pose an immediate problem for the beleaguered keeper, as a touch with them causes instant death. By way of self-defence, Zeke is rather adept at jumping over the escaped beasties and can gain bonus points for jumping over multiple creatures. As Zeke carries out his hectic crusade, a timer counts down at the top of the screen and is interspersed with various bonus items that will continually increase Zeke's score multiplier if he can collect them without dying. Get the net and you'll have a few seconds to recapture as many escaped animals as possible and send them back to their hopefully now sealed enclosure.

After a set number of stages, Zeke enters one of two bonus rounds that can be brutally difficult for the unprepared player. One mimics *Donkey Kong* and sees Zeke trying to ascend constantly moving platforms and rescue his girlfriend Zelda from a mischievous coconut-throwing monkey, while the other has you leaping over animals and climbing escalators to reach your gal.

With its bright, colourful visuals, lightning-fast pace and challenging gameplay, it's a mystery why *Zoo Keeper* never received any home conversions at the time of its release. Ken Van Mersbergen recently found animation code for an Atari 2600 version, but no other conversions ever appear to have been attempted. It's possible that the great crash may have been responsible, but with so many of its contemporaries eventually making it to various systems, this seems rather unlikely.

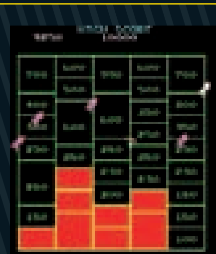
Luckily, our story does have a happy ending, as *Zoo Keeper* eventually received an Xbox, PC and PS2 release on the excellent 2005 *Taito Legends* compilation. It may have taken 23 years to receive a home release, but at least Taito's excellent game is more accessible to the average gamer. Track it down and maybe you'll fall in love like we did.

Converted Alternative

AMIDAR 1981

This is tenuous, but *Zoo Keeper*'s gameplay is so refreshing that this is the closet arcade game we could think of. While scoring mechanics are completely different, there's still the need to capture squares by… Sod it, it's not really anything like *Zoo Keeper,* which just goes to show how original Taito's game was.





BLOOD BROS

■ **Developer:** Tad Corporation
■ **Year Released:** 1990 ■ **Genre:** Run-and-gun

■ **After finding success with *Cabal* in 1988, Tad Corporation applied its tried-and-tested template to the Wild West. The end result was *Blood Bros*, a bloodthirsty blaster that scored highly for allowing you to play as an American Indian in two-player mode, but then shat on that groundbreaking concept from a great height by making Indians one of the most numerous foes in the game.**

Indeed, *Blood Bros* doesn't care who you shoot, as Indians, cowboys, can-can women and animals are all shot indiscriminately by the two leads. While it's undeniably enjoyable to mow down hordes of enemies and watch huge buildings crumble under your repeated fire, you can't help but feel a little guilty after you've shot an innocent horse in the face for the fifth time just so you could pick up a 10,000 point bonus.

Considering that *Cabal* was ported to so many home systems in the late Eighties, it seems strange that *Blood Bros* wasn't given the same treatment. Maybe it was a little too similar to Tad Corporation's last game, or it could have just been worries over confusion with the similarly named *Blood Brothers*. We may never know.



» [Arcade] This boss initially appears in the distance, letting you attack straight away.

Converted Alternative

CABAL 1988

Tad Corporation's shooter is virtually the same experience and a must for hardcore shooter fans. Unlike *Blood Bros*, however, it was released on a variety of different systems, from the Spectrum to the NES. Make sure you play the excellent Amiga port.



BIOMECHANICAL TOY

■ **Developer:** Zeus Software
■ **Year Released:** 1995 ■ **Genre:** Run-and-gun



» [Arcade] The visuals look reminiscent of an Amiga platformer, but this is no *Zool*.

■ **Interestingly, this ballsy little shooter can be traced back to the Amstrad CPC. Sir Alan Sugar's machine is where Raul Lopez and Ricardo Puerto first cut their teeth by creating games for Spanish developer Dynamic. Their company, Zeus Software, is best known for the Amiga/Mega Drive platformer *Risky Woods*, but it's this superb run-and-gun from 1995 that is easily its most accomplished work.**

Mimicking the design of Treasure with its repeatable bosses, quirky design and hardcore action, *Biomechanical Toy* is an interesting clash of ideas that constantly impresses, even if it never manages to compete against the games that it imitates. The difficulty is high, but its polish and tight gameplay will keep you coming back.

One interesting and rather handy aspect of *Biomechanical Toy* is the ability to jump on certain enemies, allowing you to access bonus items. Fruit restores your energy, your weapon can be upgraded, and it's possible to rescue bizarre creatures that will aid you on your quest. It's not the most original example, but *Biomechanical Toy* is a fun arcade blaster that fans should definitely check out.

Converted Alternative

3 WONDERS 1991

After a good arcade alternative to *Biomechanical Toy* that reached home systems? Then we'd heartily recommend Capcom's *3 Wonders*. In addition to the excellent run-and-gun *Midnight Wanderers*, it also features two other games; *Chariot* and *Don't Pull*.



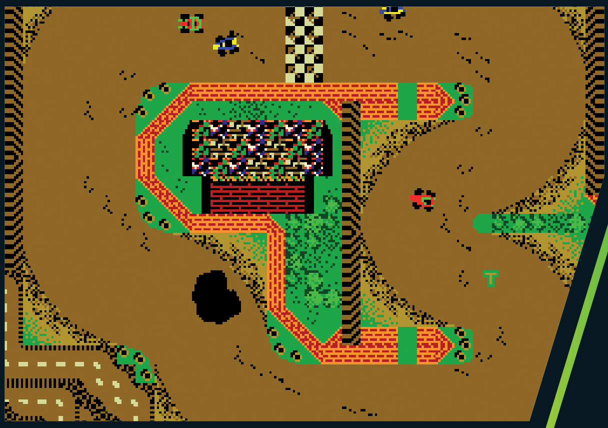
Best Left In The Arcade

AMERICAN SPEEDWAY

■ **Developer:** Enerdyne Technologies ■ **Year Released:** 1987 ■ **Genre:** Racing

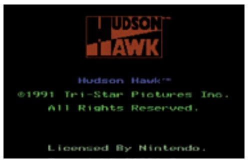
■ **Sometimes it's a complete mystery as to why an arcade game never receives a home port. In the case of *American Speedway*, it's easier to understand. Despite featuring some catchy little tunes, this is a poor man's *Super Sprint*, no matter how you look at it.**

Released a full year after Atari's cult racer and seemingly designed to ride on its coat tails, *American Speedway* was inferior in virtually every way. The most obvious was the omission of a third player, instantly making it look inferior to Atari's machine – although this may have been a conscious decision to get it into smaller arcades. Other issues were the unsophisticated visuals that looked crude next to the sleek stylings of Atari's game, and the weaker artificial intelligence. By far the biggest fault with *American Speedway*, however, was the ping-pong physics that saw carts hurtling haphazardly across the track whenever they collided. Little wonder so few people have heard of it.



HUDSON HAWK

CAT BURGLING WITHOUT THE CATS



- **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN
- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER/PUZZLER
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** NES
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID



HISTORY

After interviewing Gary Bracey in issue 68, there was one game I told myself I'd return to as soon as I got back into the office. With such a promising script resulting in such a mediocre film – Gary told me it was the best he'd read when he was being sent them on an hourly basis after the success of *Robocop* – I was curious to remind myself what Ocean did with the *Hudson Hawk* license. Did the developer play things close to the script, which was rewritten repeatedly over the course of the film's production, or was it more in-keeping with the slapstick and offbeat nature of the film?

While the game has certainly got a few issues - namely the frustrating difficulty owing largely to the weird way in which Hawk and objects move with an overzealous sense of inertia – look past them and *Hudson Hawk* is a pretty decent little puzzle/platformer, boasting nice graphics and some great puzzle/action set-pieces.

The game is split into three lengthy stages, with each based on a key scene from the film. In the first, your mission is to pinch a valuable artefact from an auction house (a horse statuette); in the second level, you do the same thing in the Vatican (this time swiping an old book); and the final stage finds Hawk stealing a crystal from Castle Da Vinci that has the power to turn lead into gold.

So it sounds faithful to the source material, though that only rings true for the levels, which offer a mix of twitchy platforming and action-based mind-ticklers. Where Ocean wielded artistic license using a paintball gun is in the game's assortment of enemies. Hawk's foes vary from men sweeping floors and security guards to a random assortment of different breeds of dogs, a charging rhino and something that looks like an alien riding a bicycle. It's all a bit mad really, and certainly sides with the quirky tone of the movie. But then again, *Hudson Hawk* is clearly a typical, arbitrary platform game, but starring Bruce Willis, so all sense and sensibility must therefore go careening from out of a thirty story window anyway.






AUTO
SEGA
START
sinclair
C
B
A
Panasonic



Controlling History

From toggle switches to thin air, **Stuart Hunt** attempts to chart the evolution of the game pad, and explain how it has driven the medium in more ways than you might think

While their looks and sounds have changed dramatically over the past three decades, the ways in which we play videogames have only recently started to evolve significantly by comparison. The joystick, the fire button, the paddle, and the quirky game peripheral have all been around since the dawn of the industry, and the innovative control methods to have emerged following the Seventies can pretty much be counted on one hand.

Developed by American physicist Willy Higinbotham, the quaintly titled 1958 game *Tennis For Two* was one of the first electronic games ever produced. Built in a New York research facility, the game was a simple recreation of tennis, viewed from a side-on perspective, and its graphics were displayed through an oscilloscope. Surprisingly, considering the game's age, *TFT* demonstrated an intelligent control scheme that suited the style of the game: played by two people, each player used an analogue control box that contained a fire button to strike the ball and a rotatable knob that could influence its trajectory.

Of course, *TFT* was a rare exception. Back then, many early



» The diminutive Cheetah Bug; its novelty looks belied great design and a small, responsive stick, making it an instant winner with gamers.

Tom Taylor

Ergonomics expert Tom Taylor, a teacher of product and graphical design, explains to us what features make a good game pad



RG: What do you think about early joypads like the 2600, ColecoVision and NES pads from an ergonomics point of view?
TT: The ergonomics of the Atari 2600 and NES game pad were truly appalling. I remember playing on them and having to stop every once in a while due to cramp. I believe that ergonomics did not enter into the design process. If you look at what Microsoft and Sony have achieved with the modern controllers, it's beyond belief why Nintendo thought that a rectangular design was going to be comfortable to hold.

RG: In your opinion, what makes a good joypad?
TT: To answer this I think you have to look at examples such as the early Microsoft Sidewinder, Xbox and PSone controllers. Here we start to see the use of anthropometric data to help the designers create the modern controllers we have today. For me, what makes a good controller is something I can use for hours on end and feel no discomfort, but also something that my six-year-old son can pick up and use with no difficulties.

RG: How important has analogue control been for videogames?
TT: Hugely. Can you imagine trying to play *Call Of Duty* with a digital thumb stick? You would have no fine movement, and we would still be playing games like *Pong* and *Donkey Kong*. Both are great games even now, but for pure interactivity, an analogue controller is a must.

RG: Which company has a history of making the best, most ergonomic console pads, in your opinion?
TT: For me it has to be Nintendo. Okay, the NES joypad was a true horror to use. If you then look at the development they have put into game pads over the years, with the Super Nintendo joypad, N64 and finally the Wii Remote, for me they are a clear winner.

RG: What would you say was the best controller from the past?
TT: This is an easy one: the N64 due to its clever three-handed design – one for digital control and the other for analogue. The number of hours I spent using it to play *Mario Kart 64* in comfort is scary.

RG: What do you think is the best joypad currently on the market?
TT: Yet again, another easy one: the Xbox 360 controller. I can play for hours using it with no discomfort. And my six-year-old son can pick it up and use it with ease. It's a great example of anthropometric data being used to create an ergonomical design that can be used by people of all ages with different hand sizes.

RG: How important do you think motion-sensor controllers will become?
TT: I think they will always have their place in gaming, but for serious games I don't think they can replace the game pad. I don't see how they can build in the accuracy or range control that an analogue thumb stick is capable of.



» The Quickshot 130F featured an auto-fire button plus four input settings to allow Atari/Commodore, MSX, Amstrad or Sega machine functionality.

games and control schemes were designed using whatever was available to engineers at the time. In the case of Steve Russell's seminal 1962 videogame *Spacewar!* – the world's first built-for-purpose videogame – the game ran on colossal PDP-1 mainframe hardware, and players used five toggle switches on the machine to operate the left and right rotation, thrust, firing and hyperspace controls of the game's two spaceships. However, realising that this control method proved cumbersome and awkward, engineers later created standalone control boxes, each containing two toggle switches and a single action button. Hooked up to the PDP-1 with a wire, these boxes would become the earliest examples of a dedicated game controller.

By 1971, the first wave of commercial coin-operated videogames were beginning to appear. First to be released was Bill Pits and Hugh Tuck's *Galaxy Game*. The game was a reprogrammed version of *Spacewar!* that ran from PDP-11/20 hardware but was mounted inside a fibreglass unit, giving it the appearance of an arcade machine. In the same year, Nolan Bushnell also released his revision of *Spacewar!*, *Computer Space*. However, instead of toggle switches, Bushnell further simplified the control scheme using buttons for input.

The early Seventies also saw the advent of the paddle controls. A variant of the rotatable knob controller first seen in *TFT*, the paddle, which works using a potentiometer to vary the output of the voltage levels to signal movement, was first used for a commercial videogame in Atari's *Pong*, in 1972. And like *TFT*, the simple control scheme – no buttons, no dials, just a simple paddle used to move the game's in-game paddles up and down – went hand in hand with *Pong*'s simple gameplay, and allowed its cabinet to look sparse and uncluttered so as not to alienate potential customers who were green to videogames.

Designed by Ralph Bear, the Magnavox Odyssey (1972) is responsible for beginning the home videogame market. The first ever multi-game console, the machine worked in a similar way to the oscilloscope graphics of *Tennis For Two*: it basically projected light sources on screen that could be moved by players to play basic videogames, and used various overlays that rested on television screens to give its games colour and graphics. Replicating the strange space-age shape of the console itself, the Odyssey controller featured two analogue paddles positioned either side of its toaster-shaped design: one to allow vertical movement, and the other horizontal movement of one of two differing sized glowing light cursors that appeared on screen. A third dial, added to the crest of the horizontal paddle, allowed manipulation of a third light source that represented balls and torpedoes in some Odyssey games. Magnavox also released an unsettlingly realistic light gun for the Odyssey. Known as the Shooting Gallery – it came packed with a selection of shooting games, hence the name – it worked by detecting hits against light sources on the television and was the first commercial game peripheral released for any home console.

The most notable controller to come out following the Odyssey's release was the Fairchild Channel F's Hand-Controller in 1976. The Hand-Controller took the appearance of a short, baseless joystick

A Musical Interlude

PaRappa has a lot to answer for…

Drums

FIRST SEEN IN: TAIKO: DRUM MASTER
YEAR RELEASED: 2004

While many will remember angering the neighbours using the bongo drums that came packed with *Donkey Konga* (seen here), the drum peripheral was introduced by the popular Japanese rhythmic game series, *Taiko no Tatsujin* (*Taiko: Drum Master* in the West). Released on the PlayStation 2 in Japan and the US, the game came with a plastic replica drum called a TaTaCon, and players performed actions by striking its pressure-sensitive face panels using plastic drumsticks that resembled Cheestrings.



Guitar Controllers

FIRST SEEN IN: GUITARFREAKS
YEAR RELEASED: 1998

While popularised in recent years by *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*, it was Konami that introduced the world to the delights of plastic guitar-shaped controllers when it unleashed *GuitarFreaks* in 1998. Guitar controllers are essentially all very similar in their design: buttons on the neck to replicate the playing of strings and chords, and a fret lever to simulate the strumming of a real guitar. Later models also include a whammy bar, and a series of secondary buttons for solos.





Maracas

FIRST SEEN IN: SAMBA DE AMIGO
YEAR RELEASED: 1999

Debuting in arcades, before making its way into the home via the Dreamcast, *Samba De Amigo* was a colourful rhythm-action game that found players having to match on-screen hand gestures – shakes and poses – using replica maracas. While the arcade maracas worked using magnetic sensors to pick up movement, the home version operated using a sensor bar positioned just in front of the player's feet. It picks up movement using ultrasonic transmitters found on the wire of the maracas.



» Sega was one of the first manufacturers to consider ergonomics in controller design.

that was bolted onto a long black hand grip. Predating Atari's VCS Stick by a year, it is one of the earliest examples of a joystick-style controller, and is also one of the first to be designed with ergonomics in mind. The Fairchild's short triangular-shaped stick could also be used like a traditional joystick, or rotated to work like a paddle. It was pressure-sensitive and could be pushed down to act like a fire button, and pulled up like a bottle opener to signal another input to the console.

But it was Atari that would really popularise the joystick controller. The Atari VCS stick (1977) remains one of the most iconic game controllers ever designed. Comprising a dark black base housing a single digital red fire button and a cylindrical four-way joystick positioned in its centre, its simple design may not have been much to look at, but it hid its own benefits. Realising that the VCS would be the first time that many people would ever see a videogame, let alone actually pick one up and play one, Atari purposely packed the VCS with a simple control scheme that users could easily pick up and use. Additionally, the VCS stick's all-purpose feel was designed to cope with the multitude of different games that would later appear on the console.

Atari's VCS console was also notable for having a wide range of control peripherals. In a bid to replicate an authentic arcade experience for the console's arcade ports, Atari later released the Paddle Controller for use with games such as *Pong*, *Breakout* and *Warlords*, and the Driving Controller – basically identical to the Paddle Controller, except it was sold individually rather than in pairs – for use with racing games *Indy 500* and *Race*. It also released the Keyboard Controller, for use with the programming software tool Basic Programming and a small number of educational software titles.

By the end of the Seventies, controller designs were becoming more complex. The Intellivision controller, for instance, featured a digital control disc with 16 directional positions and a 12-button numerical pad, plus four additional action buttons positioned on its sides. The number pad made use of overlays that explained the function of each button for their respective games. Coleco Industries later imitated this style of controller for its ColecoVision console in 1982, but replaced the control disc with a short joystick. To compete with Atari, Coleco also released a number of peripherals for its machine, including a steering wheel controller; a trackball, which came packed with the games *Victory* and the *Centipede* clone *Slither*, and the Super Controller. Held like a pricing gun, and with finger triggers forming the fingery bit of the hand grip, the weighty Super Controller was produced specifically to play with the console's *Super Action* series of sport games.

By the early Eighties, the videogame industry was becoming flooded with game consoles and low-budget videogames as electronic manufacturers scrambled to capitalise on demand – one of the many contributing factors of its eventual collapse in 1983. And the glut of peripherals, add-ons and newfangled control schemes was only

> **"Magnavox's unsettlingly realistic light gun for the Odyssey was the first game peripheral"**

Novelty Items

We reflect on some of the most barmy game controllers to ever find a release

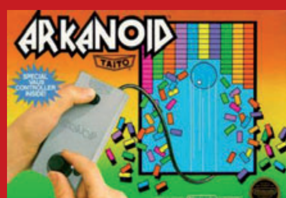


Atari Track & Field Controller 1984

This button-basher's wet dream was released with the Atari 2600 port of *Track & Field*. Its arcade stylings featured three action buttons – two white 'run' buttons and a single red one to perform a jump or throw – and was compatible with other Atari games and machines, but control was obviously restricted to just left, right and shoot. The unit was also sold separately.

Arkanoid (Vaus) Controller 1987

Another peripheral designed to offer the authentic arcade experience, the *Arkanoid* Controller – or Vaus Controller, derived from the name of the ship in the game – was released by Taito to offer a precise paddle control system for the NES port of *Arkanoid*. Three variants were released, including one that allowed connection of another controller for multiplayer gaming.





Namco neGcon 1994

Released for the PlayStation, Namco's twistable neGcon controller was designed specifically for racing games. The most notable aspect of the neGcon pad was that it featured two analogue face buttons – the standard PlayStation buttons are digital – and the two halves of the pad could be twisted to offer an analogue steering input, offering finer precision for handling, acceleration and braking.

Steel Battalion Controller 2002

With more buttons than the Hubble Space Telescope, the *Steel Battalion* Controller was released by Capcom for its simulator-style mech battle series. With over 40 buttons, twin control sticks and even pedal controls, this imposing beast was an essential purchase for fans of giant robots, but it didn't come cheap, retailing with the game at £140. It was also released in limited numbers.





Resident Evil 4 Chainsaw Controller 2005

Possibly the most pointless shaped controller ever released, this oddity by peripheral manufacturer Nuby Tech was likely to only hold appeal among die-hard *Resident Evil* loyalists. While a neat-looking collector's piece, as a control device it's unsurprisingly unwieldy and awkward. It was released for the GameCube and PlayStation 2.

adding to its already-saturated state. It's here that we turn our attentions to a company called Nintendo, which, in 1985, would help resurrect the videogame industry in North America by stripping things right back and simplifying things again – including control schemes.

The origin of Nintendo's D-pad (or directional pad) can be traced right back to its Game & Watch electronic games – one of Nintendo's earliest forays in electronic entertainment. These cute, pocket-sized LCD games were designed to offer true portable gaming, but through their transportable design, they would also come to revolutionise the design of game controllers forever. Realising that incorporating a joystick into the design of the G&W would impede the pocket nature of his new product, Yokoi looked to a more portable control system and eventually settled on using tiny rubber buttons. Not only would buttons allow the Game & Watch to retain its portability, but they also offered a simple and responsive control method – pressing buttons requires less physical movement than moving a joystick – that suited the twitchy but simplistic nature of the G&W games. This control scheme was refined further in 1982 with the release of the G&W title *Donkey Kong Jr.* It featured four action buttons that were positioned in a cross position to visually correspond with the movements up, down, left and right, and the D-pad was born. Nintendo would patent this revolutionary and unique cross-shape button design, and incorporate it into every one of its control pads from that moment on.

While often criticised for its angular look, the Famicom/NES joypad was actually very intelligent in its design. Borrowing the D-pad and simple control scheme of the Game & Watch games – two action buttons and Select and Start to toggle between game modes – the NES pad's simple layout, like Atari's VCS stick and *Pong*'s paddle controls, would find appeal with those unfamiliar with videogames. They also suited the uncomplicated nature of those early Nintendo games, and by limiting the NES pad to just two action buttons, it meant that most developers were forced to make games for the NES easy to pick up and play. It was owing to the success of the NES that the game pad then became the preferred and adopted control method for console manufacturers, with many companies quickly submitting their own take on Nintendo's seminal D-pad controller. In 1986, Atari released a comparable controller for the 7800, featuring two action buttons and a cross-shape D-pad that had a hole in its centre to allow attachment of a small screw-in joystick, and Sega released a similar controller for its Sega Mark III/Sega Master System. The SMS pad featured two action buttons, and an eight-way D-pad. Known as the D-button as its square shape gave it the look of a button, early versions of the pad also allowed the attachment of a small joystick.

Finally, there was the PC-Engine controller (1987). The most comparable





» The six-button SNES pad is a seminal entry in the evolution of controller design.



» Atari released a variant of the Fairchild Channel F control stick for its VCS. Named the Video Command, it differed in that its stick wasn't rotatable and had a single fire button on its hand grip.



» The Atari VCS stick may have been stiff and clumsy, but it proved functional and accessible to green gamers.



joypad to the NES controller in terms of look, it featured two action buttons, Select and Run buttons, and a circular D-pad. Later iterations, such as the controllers that came packed with the SuperGrafx and Turbo Duo, added three-way turbo switches for each of their action buttons.

Meanwhile, throughout Europe and parts of North America, thanks to the booming microcomputer and arcade industries, joysticks still had a strong following. Like Nintendo, many joystick manufacturers had realised that stripping things back was gainful, and produced basic but functional joysticks to suit the needs of gamers. Most of these designs were reminiscent of the early Atari VCS stick, and featured DE-9 connectors, digital sticks and two digital fire buttons for left or right-handed use. Movement in early digital joysticks worked from leaf switches, where the joystick would register movement whenever the stick was pushed in the desired direction, causing two metal connectors to meet. Over time, though, these leaf connectors would bend, causing connections to fail unless the joystick was opened up and the connectors readjusted, understandably causing many headaches for arcade operators. The introduction of micro switch technology in joysticks would help solve this problem. Micro switches were more robust and, as they could be triggered with very little physical force, were also more responsive. As well as the change from leaf to micro switch technology in joysticks, the early Eighties saw the first analogue joysticks emerge with the release of the Vectrex and Atari 5200 (both 1982) joystick controllers. Unlike digital joysticks, which registered movement whenever a connection between two connectors was made, analogue sticks worked using potentiometers, like the earlier paddles, to offer a continual input of activity, and better precision.

> **"The Game & Watch would come to revolutionise the design of game controllers forever"**

In 1989, British peripheral manufacturer Konix, maker of the popular Konix Speed King stick, planned to enter the console market with its innovative Konix Multisystem – a television-based console that took the shape of a controller. The console was designed with the assistance of Cambridge-based Flare Technologies, which would later have a hand in the development of the Atari Jaguar, with Konix coming up with the console's unique three-part design – the main



» Many companies, such as Cheetah, imitated the Atari VCS stick in their joystick design.



» The PlayStation pad is up there with the best ever designed, hence the design's longevity.

system could transform into a steering wheel, flight yoke or bike handlebars, and it also came with a gaming seat boasting surround sound and haptic feedback technology, predating Nintendo's N64 Rumble Pak peripheral by eight years – and Flare coming up with the processor and hardware. Despite boasting some impressive specs and support – it featured a 16-bit 8086 processor and 3D capabilities – plus planned third-party software from high-profile developers, including Llamasoft, EA, Ocean and Argonaut, Konix experienced trouble in trying to raise the money to get the console to market, forcing its release to be pushed back until it was eventually scrapped altogether.

Entering the Nineties, many console manufacturers finally started considering ergonomics in the design of their game pads. The Sega Mega Drive control pad (1988) not only slotted into hands better, thanks to its kidney shape, but also featured an ergonomic button layout. The pad had three action buttons, and Sega's decision to go with this setup was likely a result of its early arcade games. *Altered Beast*, *Golden Axe* and *Shinobi* all featured three action buttons on their arcade cabs, and they were positioned diagonally to follow the natural resting position of the right thumb: another defining moment in controller design that would quickly go on to become the standard. The Mega Drive controller also featured an improved version of the SMS D-button. More similar to the NES D-pad, the Mega Drive version added a cross-shape detail, affording more precision to the user, and was set slightly into the pad to provide a neat gully for left thumbs.

In 1990, Nintendo answered back by releasing one of the most popular and copied control pads ever made. A subtle tweak on its NES pad, the SNES

Wyn Holloway

We track down Wyn Holloway, founder of the British computer peripheral company Creative Devices Research, better known as Konix, and designer of the popular Speed King joystick

Special thanks to Mark Campbell for putting us in touch with Wyn. Be sure to visit **http://www.konixmultisystem.co.uk/index.php?id=home**



» The Konix Speed King revolutionised joysticks, and how we played *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*.

RG: You started out running your own computer shop, so why did you decide to move into joystick manufacturing?

WH: I used to run a computer shop in the Eighties, and the joysticks that were on the market were very cheap and cheerful. And our biggest problem was joystick returns – I remember the release of *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*; it was an absolute nightmare. I decided to do something about it.

RG: How did you come up with the handheld design of the Konix Speed King?

WH: I noticed the sticks used to have suckers on them. We used to have a 'try before you buy' section in the shop, and the kids could come in and try the computer or games before they purchased. But instead of setting the joystick down on the top where we set it all up, the kids used to hold them, and they'd be bouncing around all over the shop.

RG: And what about the actual look of the Speed King?

WH: So I bought some Plasticine and moulded it into a handheld unit, and then I thought, 'Right, I've got to design something to fit inside that shape', and looked into micro switches and I approached a French company who used to supply them to the aviation industry. They were about £1.40 each, but I managed to get the price down to 40 pence by agreeing to place a significant order. Then I worked in my garage and got a prototype working and from that we had the tool made. That was it.

RG: What sort of reaction did you get when you showcased the joystick?

WH: Initial reaction wasn't all that promising. I attended the Consumer Electronics Show in London and had made 100 to take with me, but I didn't sell any. We found out this was down to the packaging. We didn't have much money and the boxes we made were rubbish, and customer perception was that if the packaging was rubbish then so was the product. So we ended up raising a bit of money, rethinking the packaging and sorting out a few problems with the moulding; we then did a distributor deal, managed to get the price to a competitive £12.99 – the same retail price as the cheaper joysticks, so they were competitive – including a two-year warranty.

From then we went to another show, and we set it up with *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*, and the kids loved it because of the accuracy. We then did a deal with a European group of distributors, which ensured our buying power was better, and they gave me an order for 500,000 units. We took on a little factory and expanded the company from there. Then we met Epyx at another show, went over to the States and met Toys R Us, Sears and Macy's, and Epyx gave us an order for 3 million units. In one year we went from unknown to one of the largest joystick manufacturers in the world.

RG: Were you ever worried that the Speed King would alienate left-handed gamers?

WH: Yes we were, and we ran a competition in a magazine for left-handed people, and over 80 per cent of left-handed people told us not to change it. What came back was that the triggers were brilliant for left hands, so what they would do is instead of moving the stick and holding the base, they'd move the base and hold the stick.



controller was dog-bone shaped, compact, and its iconic design and clean button layout is still used in game pads today. As well as being more comfortable to hold, the controller featured a softer D-pad and four diagonally positioned face buttons that were complemented by two shoulder buttons placed at the top of the pad. A canny design choice by Nintendo, the two bumper buttons gave the controller a total of six buttons without it looking cluttered. Furthermore, having twice as many action buttons as the Mega Drive proved advantageous to the Super Nintendo in the wake of six-button games such as *Street Fighter II*.

The eventual return to the console market by Atari, with the Atari Jaguar in 1993, resulted in one of the most disastrous high-profile console releases in history. Citing that the machine was difficult to program for, Atari's 64-bit beast failed to gain support from third-party developers. And learning nothing from the boom and bust nature of the videogame industry following the crash of 1983, Atari did itself no favours by releasing its new machine at a time when the console market was once again looking saturated. But the problems didn't end there. The Jaguar also featured one of the most ill-conceived game controllers ever designed. Shaped like a haggis, the Jaguar controller was bulky, ugly and cumbersome, and its dark black case and red buttons, which gave it the aesthetic of the old Atari VCS stick, made it look old and dated from the outset. The Jaguar controller featured all the normal control elements that gamers had come to expect: a D-pad, two Start buttons and three diagonally positioned action buttons. However, owing to Atari's decision to add an interfering numerical pad to the design – the intention was to make use of instruction overlays much like the Intellivision and ColecoVision controllers – the direction and action buttons were pushed to the top of the controller, making its layout feel awkward and cumbersome.

"The SNES pad's iconic design and clean button layout is still used in game pads today"

By the mid-Nineties, 32-bit consoles and their respective controllers were appearing. For the Sega Saturn controller (1994), Sega would base the design on the six-button version of the Mega Drive controller, which it had packed with Mega Drive 2 consoles. As well as being thinner and shapelier, the Saturn pad featured two fantastically ergonomic shoulder buttons. In North America and Europe, however, the Saturn controller underwent a transformation. As well as a change in colour to tie in with the black look of the Saturn in these territories, it was chunkier, featured a different, spikier D-pad, and those fantastic ergonomic shoulder buttons were planed off so as to tidily integrate them into the shape of the pad.

In 1994, a determined Sony finally entered the videogame hardware arena with the PlayStation. Given Sony's infamous past with Nintendo – Sony's contract to manufacture the SPC-700 sound chip for the Super Nintendo, the ill-fated SNES PlayStation project, and then Sony's humiliation following the bombshell that Nintendo was in cahoots with Philips to manufacture the SNES CD-ROM drive – it's little wonder that the PlayStation controller shared more than a passing resemblance to the SNES pad. Sony had invested a significant amount of cash into the SNES PlayStation project, even getting as far as the prototype stage, so it's little surprise that it mimicked Nintendo's popular SNES pad design. The PlayStation controller is essentially just a more ergonomic SNES pad, adding two additional shoulder buttons (L2 and R2) and incorporating two vertical hand grips into its design, offering more comfort and stability.

With the 32-bit generation came a growing trend for polygon-pushing 3D games. And while D-pads worked brilliantly in flat worlds, they weren't really equipped to handle the depth and precision required to steer avatars in 3D ones – remember how dire the controls were in *Resident Evil*. 1996 marks the year that all the big console manufacturers turned to analogue sticks for help. In this year, Nintendo released



» What a glorious sight. More sticks than you can shake a rod at.



» The multi-use N64 pad remains one of the most inventive controller designs ever released.

Jon Hare

Jon Hare reveals to us his favourite examples of good control in videogames, and why intuitive control is essential



RG: Looking back over the years, what game controllers have impressed you most and why?

JH: Personally, I think certain peripherals suit different games better, so I would not say I have favourite controllers but more favourite applications of controllers. My number one favourite example of this is the archery in *Wii Sports Resort*. This, to me, is as perfect a simulation of a sport as you are ever likely to find. It does not have a lot of wow factor, but it is almost perfect in its execution. Second is the old *Centipede* arcade machine with the track ball; I loved that when I was 14. Third favourite is *WarioWare*. This game really utilises what the DS can do; a brilliant piece of design. Worst controller is the horrible Mac single-button mouse. I just don't get it at all.

RG: How significant a part do you think intelligent controls play in terms of good game design?

JH: Good controls play a massive part in game design. On all of our old C64 and Amiga games, we always did the controls first before everything else. It was only the world of writing design documents to justify getting paid that really changed this.

You must remember game controls are directly tied into on-screen feedback of events. Often, when moving a controller in a direction, it is unclear when you have reached your destination; it is only on-screen clues, sound effects and force feedback that will give you notification of successful or disastrous execution of controller manoeuvres. They also need to be managed and massaged into movement that is acceptable to the players. Too many green designers make the mistake of thinking realistic movement means accurate representation of the exact movements using the controller. However, this policy is flawed. If you want to emulate what really happens, you'd get the player to walk, not push a little plastic stick forward. Also, to maximise other areas of the game, we sometimes need to be able to predict certain elements of the way characters move on screen. Controllers that give players apparent full control are great, but often it is an illusion. Being a great illusionist is all part of being a great games designer or programmer.

RG: All of your titles featured very simple controls. Was this something you always tried to rein in with your games?

JH: My philosophy to games is pretty simple: the game has to be easy to get, shouldn't need too much explaining, and be highly intuitive. Our games were designed to guess how the player was most likely to assume a certain control would work and then try to deliver what he expected. Nowadays people do this too, but in the main they do it by copying the control protocols of other games in similar genres. In Sensible's time, we were allowed to make up these new rules for control mechanisms without fear of alienating the players.

RG: What is your opinion on the current trend of motion-sensor technology? Do you feel that it has a bright future?

JH: Well, I have made two Wii games so far and I have seen Natal in action. The biggest gripes are sensitivity and speed. Certainly the [MotionPlus] for the Wii controller seems to make a bit of a difference now to certain types of spinning and aiming movements, but it is nothing more than it should have been in the first place. Natal also seems a little slow and woolly at present, although I am sure it will tighten up. Even once you overcome delay problems, though, you still have to overcome the bigger problem of foot movement and how to emulate it on a hands-only controller. You can use a stick to walk around, but it feels weird when you are mixing it with more realistic hand movements. I think the current set of movement-based controllers are a fad; however, I think the next phase of motion-based controllers could be much better, maybe in about four years.

RG: Do you think the industry will ever move away from hand-based control pads entirely?

JH: No, I don't think it can. The on/off precisely timed nature of the button click is too accurate and convenient to ever be ditched entirely. People must remember hands-free movement controls don't give us real-life controls; they give us another variant of interpreting movement of our bodies into instructions to change the next animation frame of objects drawn on computer screens. This is an inherently unnatural process whichever way you approach it.



» The Jaguar pad was a perfect example of poor controller design. It was cumbersome, crowded, and a little dated in the looks department.

the N64 to the market, and it came with one of the most innovative controller designs ever seen. The pad's unique M shape allowed it to be held in three different ways, and its unique analogue stick – or 'Control Stick', as it was coined – offered a precise control method that was perfect for platform games such as *Super Mario 64*, and it's understood that Nintendo designed the N64 controller around this game, while its yellow C-buttons for controlling in-game cameras proved invaluable in games such as *GoldenEye* and *Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*. The N64 controller was also the first pad to feature haptic feedback through the attachment of a Rumble Pak peripheral. Launched in 1997 to coincide with the release of *Star Fox 64*, the Rumble Pak could be attached to the memory cartridge slot underneath the pad and exerted a physical output on the user to offer a heightened sense of immersion.

In 1996 Sega also released a custom analogue controller for its groundbreaking Saturn game *NiGHTS Into Dreams*. Its large, round design was carried over to the design of the Dreamcast controller, and it's the design that Microsoft would ostensibly base its original Xbox controller on. But Sony beat both Sega and Nintendo to the punch by releasing the Analog Joystick flight stick peripheral for the PlayStation. Sony followed this up with the PlayStation Dual Analog Controller a year later, which added two analogue nubs to the original PlayStation pad to offer precision control. The Dual Analog Controller's successor, the DualShock, then incorporated force-feedback through two motors that provided soft and strong vibrations, and rubber-textured analogue nubs that could be pressed down to actuate two additional inputs (L3 and R3). Sony would later go on to release a total of three variants of the DualShock; one for each of its three games consoles. The PlayStation 3 variant, the DualShock 3, was a wireless controller that featured tilt-sensor technology. It was the successor to the PS3's Sixaxis Wireless Controller, a lightweight tilt-sensor pad without the vibration technology.

Until now, all of Nintendo's controller designs had brought something unique and innovative to the table. However, its next controller would memorably buck this trend. While well-constructed and ergonomically sound, the GameCube pad was essentially a Swiss Army knife in terms of controller design that tried to encompass all the control schemes that had come before it. As a result, trying to accommodate the myriad controls that gamers were familiar with meant the pad suffered by looking cluttered and unwieldy. Similar in design to the DualShock, the GameCube pad juggled eight buttons, two analogue sticks – one stick was a variant of the N64's C-buttons – a D-pad and a built-in rumble motor. And its derivative and overtly



» Some joystick designs, such as the QJ Superstar, based their look on arcade control panels.

It's been motion-able

Think arm-waving began with the Wii? Then think again



Mattel Power Glove

Released by toy company Mattel, the Power Glove was the first example of a game controller to use gestural recognition technology, making it a precursor to the Wii Remote. Criticised for being needlessly complex to work and its motion sensor technology feeling imprecise, despite big claims and finding endorsement in the movie *The Wizard*, the Power Glove failed to find appeal in the marketplace.

Brøderbund U-Force

Better known for its software output, Brøderbund also released this unusual motion-sensor peripheral for the NES. Using two perpendicular infrared sensors, it allowed NES owners to theoretically control games using hand gestures. In reality, though, trying to actuate simple movements like moving left or right with the device proved a real headache, and NES owners swiftly returned to their reliable D-pads.



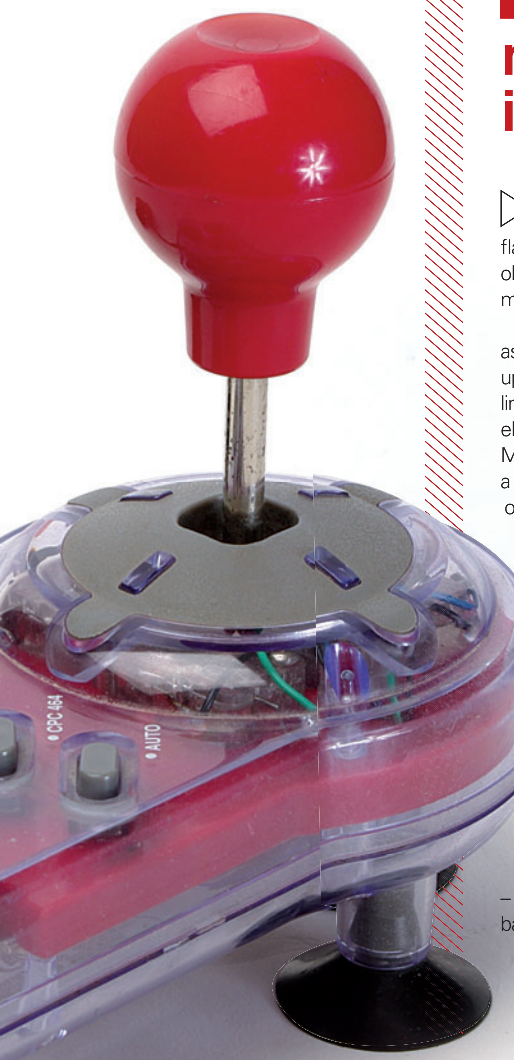


Sega Activator

On paper, the Sega Activator sounded brain-meltingly brilliant. It was a beat-'em-up games peripheral spliced with what looks like a UFC play mat. The player placed the octagon-shaped device on the ground and then stood inside it, punching and kicking the air and using infrared beams to register hits. Low hits registered a kick in the game, while high ones triggered a punch, and the player's actions were mimicked on screen… ish. Sadly, the Activator's beams were too sensitive and the software applications too limited to be deemed anything but a disappointing experiment.



» The Quickshot II Turbo featured an auto-fire function, and its fire buttons were incorporated into the stick.



> "The Wii marked a watershed moment, and its ultimate influence is impossible to tell"

complex nature also went some way to scupper Nintendo's creative flair. Shigeru Miyamoto echoed this observation in an interview with *Famitsu* magazine in 2008.

"We made [the GameCube controller] as a culmination of everything leading up to it, but it really underwhelmed. This line of thinking doesn't give us anything else to shoot for, does it?" admitted Miyamoto. "The GameCube controller is a product of us feeling that, without this or that, people wouldn't be able to play the games we make. But then we realised that was a problem; that we were thinking based on that controller as the premise."

But Nintendo of course returned with an innovative control scheme for its next console. Likely considering the popularity and success of computer vision and gesture-recognition technology seen at work with the Sony EyeToy, and having already tested the water with gesture recognition in games – unsuccessfully in the Eighties with half-baked NES peripherals such as Mattel's Power Glove and Brøderbund's U-Force, and far more successfully with the touch-screen and stylus controls on the DS – Nintendo decided that a demand for this new immersive way of playing games existed, and knew that it had the means and know-how to apply this technology to its next games console, the Wii.

The Wii marked a watershed moment in controller design, and its ultimate influence is still impossible to predict. Its main wireless controller, the Wii Remote, looked like a television remote control, but, like the N64 pad, it could be held in different ways: either like a traditional NES controller, with control via a D-pad and two face buttons; or held like a baton to offer pointer functionality – a feature that it gets from containing multiple accelerometers that measure all directions of motion and communicating with a sensor bar that plugs into the Wii console and sits above the television. Nintendo also included a secondary analogue controller for the console that plugged into the Remote. Nicknamed the Nunchuk, it featured an analogue stick, two trigger buttons and an accelerometer to registered gestural movement, but offered no pointer functionality. Mimicking what it had done previously with *Super Mario 64* and the N64 pad, Nintendo released a series of simple games to show off the motion sensor control scheme (*Wii Sports*), and applied them intelligently to games that required more traditional control methods, like *Super Mario Galaxy*, to demonstrate the versatility of its new machine.

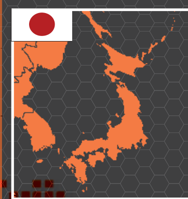
In terms of time-honoured controllers, the Xbox 360 would succeed where the GameCube failed. Essentially a far better revision of the GameCube pad, proving that Nintendo actually came very close to getting it right once again, the 360 controller is a versatile, well-constructed and wonderfully comfortable controller, and is only equalled by Sony's lasting and similarly excellent DualShock.

Microsoft's announcement in 2009 that it was following Nintendo's lead through Project Natal – a control peripheral for the Xbox that negates the need for game controllers completely by using full-body 3D motion capture and face and voice-recognition technology – provides an ironic close to this brief overview of the evolution of game controllers. Although it's highly unlikely that the game controller will ever become entirely obsolete, the very thinking that by the end of this year we could be playing games without the need for control pads is a pretty sobering thought. The game pad has proven to be an integral armament to any console's success: make a good one and your console has a far better chance of latching onto the public; make a bad one and it might just struggle in the marketplace. Moreover, considering that controllers have also helped to simplify, enhance and drive the videogame since its inception, can they really hope to advance without them? We guess only time will tell.

Joysticks courtesy of the Retro Computer Museum **www.retrocomputermuseum.co.uk** and Gavin Crossling

IMPORT ONLY

GAME ORIGIN



» COUNTRY: JAPAN
» POPULATION: 127,433,494
» CAPITAL: TOKYO
» NATIONAL LANGUAGE: JAPANESE
» CURRENCY: YEN
» TIME ZONE: GMT +9

» CO-ORDINATES: 35°41′ N 139°46′ E

INFO

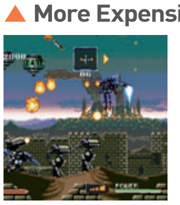


» PUBLISHER: EXACT
» DEVELOPER: IN-HOUSE
» FEATURED HARDWARE: SHARP X68000
» ALSO ON: N/A
» GENRE: ACTION
» RELEASED: 1991
» EXPECT TO PAY: Y2,400 (£15)

PRICE WATCH

» Similar titles to splash cash on

▲ More Expensive Than



RANGER X
GET IT FOR: **£10**
There's no swinging, but as it's available for less than a tenner, this is one of the best and cheapest mecha games on the Mega Drive. Control a massive robot and his motorbike as you blow up scores of enemies.

▼ Cheaper Than



METAL WARRIORS
GET IT FOR: **£40**
Of all the games in the *Valken* mould, this is probably the most expensive. Lucasarts-made, it was only released in America, but is worth the price if *Aquales* leaves you hungry for more.

AQUALES

» Fan of the Bionic Commando series? Like heavy metal? What about insanely-armed mecha robots blowing the crap out of each other? If your answers are yes, yes and mother-hugging yes, then John Szczepaniak reckons you should check out Aquales

They don't make 2D games like this anymore. The days of side-scrolling action games, especially those featuring giant robots, are long gone, as are 2D games with multiple layers of rich parallax scrolling. There are still a few modern 2D, non-polygon releases, with some such as *Muramasa* being very impressive, but whether due to lack of budget or demand, there's not as much flair these days.

Most retro fans will have heard of *Assault Suits Valken* on the SNES, known as *Cybernator* in the West. A fantastic and deservedly loved action title where you roamed maze-like levels blowing up other robots, with an impressive sense of scale, some explosive set-pieces and a decent storyline. It was actually preceded by the lesser known *Assault Suits Leynos* (*Target Earth* in the West) and, unsurprisingly, it also spawned several follow-ups and imitations, such as *Metal Warriors* and *Front Mission: Gun Hazard*.

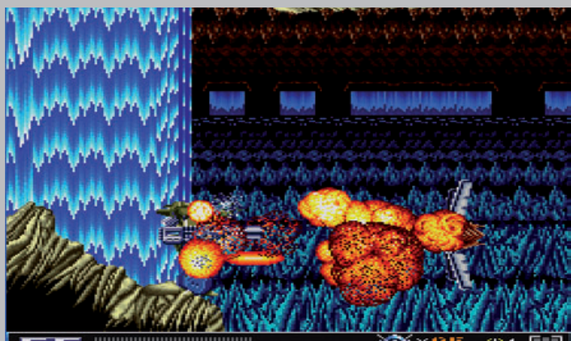
Aquales could easily be mistaken for just such an imitator, except that it was released in 1991, after *Leynos* but prior to *Valken*. Along with its similarity to the *Assault Suits* series it also has resemblances to other games – for one thing, certain weapons almost feel like something out of *Ranger X*, and one music track in particular sounds like it's lifted straight from *Ecco the Dolphin*. Of course, *Aquales* predates all of these. The only obvious game known to the West from



» [Sharp X68000] Be careful on this futuristic speeding train; there are flying enemies zooming around trying to knock you off.

which it does draw inspiration would be *Bionic Commando*, since *Aquales* features the same rigid grappling mechanics (those expecting the realistic, stretchy physics of *Umihara Kawase* should look elsewhere).

Aquales is a forgotten evolutionary ancestor. Heavily influenced by obscure titles such as Zoom's 1989 mecha-actioner *Genocide* – except instead of *Genocide*'s slow-ambling bipeds and insipid combat, developers Exact pumped things up to create something special – it never made the jump to popular consoles the way *Genocide 2* did



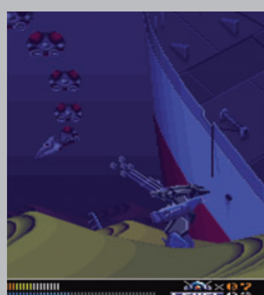
» [Sharp X68000] Flying enemies zoom in and out of the background in these underground caves.



» [Sharp X68000] Later enemies also acquire the use of a grappling arm.



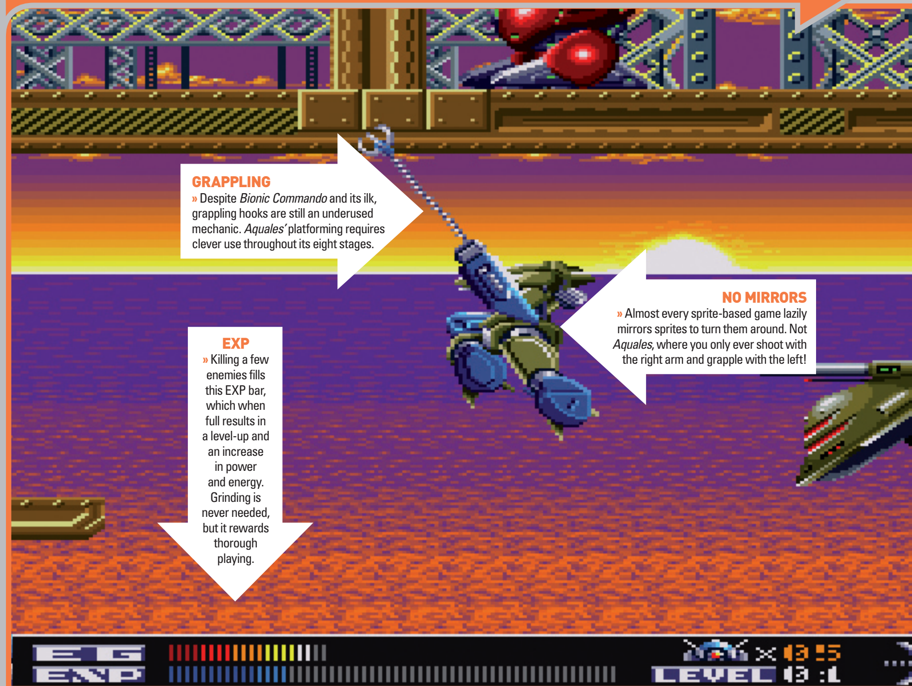
» [Sharp X68000] The green enemies in these forgotten ruins have a deadly rushing attack.



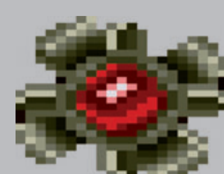
» [Sharp X68000] Against the backdrop of a sunken ship, you battle a giant sea snake.

GO DEEPER

What to look for when playing Aquales



> "What makes Aquales special is the panache with which it pulls things off" EVERYTHING OOZES THE KIND OF 16-BIT ENERGY YOU'D EXPECT FROM A TREASURE TITLE



and, while it possibly influenced later Japanese developers, *Aquales* remained unknown in the West.

For anyone with a long-running interest in games, nothing in *Aquales* should appear new or ground-breaking; despite only existing on an archaic Japanese home computer, it contains elements found in dozens of later, far more common titles. What makes it special is the panache with which it pulls things off – everything about it oozes the kind of 16-bit energy you'd expect from a Mega Drive Treasure title. It may not be as refined as a Treasure game, since the enemy AI is a little too scripted and the action is never quite as spectacular as something like *Alien Solder*, but *Aquales* tries very hard to make you like it.

The music throughout is nothing short of incredible, containing a blend of hard-rocking heavy metal, with some outstanding guitar riffs mixed in with more ambient and eerie tunes for the underwater ruins. Gameplay, while not overly varied, is solid and compelling. There are 12 weapons to find over eight lengthy stages, each of which pulsates with the kind of detailed parallax scrolling, enormous sprites and special effects we've not seen since *Thunder Force IV*. It's difficult to capture this splendour in screenshots – only in motion can you truly appreciate it.



Along with the expected swords, chainguns and rockets, there are also bouncy bullet weapons, blades on retractable chains and – our favourite – gravity flame throwers where the fire clings to and races along whatever surface it touches. The most significant item, however, is your grappling hook, capable of latching on to any surface and carrying you safely across hazards. Required throughout the game (as commonly as jumping or attacking), it keeps the game's tempo interesting, There are plenty of other small touches too, such as gaining experience points for defeating enemies. Rather than artificially lengthening the game, this instead allows for semi-random power-up moments.

It would be easy to nitpick at *Aquales'* various faults, such as the difficulty, which sometimes fluctuates between too difficult and too easy, or the occasionally clunky controls endemic of computer games. Nonetheles, for a game released in 1991 its ambitious nature – faults and all – is admirable. It is at once wholly familiar, and yet also exotic and captivating because it has remained unknown for so long, making it well worth the effort of tracking down.

CAN'T IMPORT? YOU COULD TRY



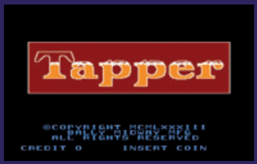
BIONIC COMMANDO REARMED

» It may not have *Aquales'* soundrack, but *Bionic Commando Rearmed* is available for download on PS3, 360 and PC, which benefits from improved visuals and retains the same classic gameplay. For those wanting a little less action than in *Aquales*, this has a greater emphasis on swinging.

THE MAKING OF… Tapper

IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** MIDWAY
- » **DEVELOPER:** MARVIN GLASS ASSOCIATES
- » **RELEASED:** 1983
- » **SYSTEM:** ARCADE
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORM
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £100+



WHO SAID BEER WON'T MAKE YOU SMARTER? IT MADE BUD WISER! RUBBISH JOKES ASIDE, KIM WILD PROPS UP A BAR OR TWO AS SCOTT MORRISON AND STEVE MEYER REVEAL HOW THEY CREATED A PUB CLASSIC THAT TRANSFORMED THE ARCADE'S FORTUNES

T*apper* is one of those unique concepts that remains as addictive today as it was back in the Eighties when it was released in a market fuelled with alcohol. Starring you in the role of a bartender, it's your job to serve beers to the customers. Speed and accuracy are the rules of the land; miss a returned glass and it perilously drops to the floor, causing it to smash and lose you a life. Take too much time, and the punters will grab you and slide you across the bar. It's a tough job being barkeep, yet in *Tapper*, it couldn't be any more compelling.

The game is the brainchild of Scott Morrison and Steve Meyer whose paths originated at Marvin Glass and Associates. "My father worked at Marvin Glass, a toy invention think tank. Around 1981 they decided to try their hand at video game concepts, originally to create working mock-ups that they could pitch to various manufacturers. It became apparent pretty quickly that the specialized nature of these projects required a dedicated staff. I was a year out of college and working in St. Louis when my dad called to see if I was interested in this new position. Since I was a big fan of video games and a cartoonist at heart, I jumped at the opportunity to interview," remembers Scott Morrison. Soon after joining the videogame sector, Scott met up with Steve Meyer and the pair had an instant connection. "Steve is one of the nicest guys on the planet, and we became close friends very quickly. That unspoken bond and our passionate work ethic made for a great creative team." It's a sentiment that Steve Meyer shares avidly. "We fed off each other and knew each other so well that we could say, 'This isn't working; try this,' and were able to push it through art, then go through with the programming. It's very unlike today, with 50-plus teams where you don't have the chemistry."

As part of their new job creating games for the arcade division, both men sat down and threw around a few ideas before coming up with the idea of having a bar where beer could be served. "We kicked around all sorts of concepts, including being the catcher rather than the thrower, but eventually we decided that being the man in charge of the beer was the way to go. I then went ahead and created some rough storyboards to depict basic game objectives and flow, which were



» [Arcade] They look friendly, but this is one mean crowd. Get those beers out pronto.



used to present to the Bally brass. Tom Neiman was their licensing guru, and he approached Budweiser to license their brand for a videogame designed to work in bars," says Scott Morrison. "To begin with we started with one bar," elaborates Steve Meyer. "I would program something, Scott would play a bit, find it was not quite there, and then discuss how to make it better. Then I said to Scott 'Can you draw a bartender in a bar with a mug?' So he did some artwork… I still wasn't sure about it. So I programmed sliding a beer down the bar and that looked more interesting. Now we added some customers and it was fun to see them catch the beer. I played around with the game mechanics until they had two bars, where you could hop between the two with the barkeep."

With Midway's interest piqued, it was time to flesh out the concept. Each bar had a distinct style and theme, the art design of which was envisaged by Scott Morrison. "The western theme was where we started, since that era connotes sliding mugs down a bar the most. That's what we pitched to secure the project, and the bartender's outfit was made to fit that setting. The sports bar was next, since that was our target location. I went with a more outdoorsy, tailgating look, mainly to make it really look different than the western bar. It allowed me to use some different colors than wood tones, and I was able to get a Budweiser blimp in there too. Next was the punk bar, which was pretty trendy at the time. All the clubs were switching from Disco to New Wave at the time, and I was a big fan of the new culture. I also thought that wacky punk caricatures would be more visually interesting than disco dudes or generic

KEEP ON TAPPING

If the barkeep seems familiar to you then it might be because he appeared in arcade title *Domino Man*. "He was only one 32x32 sprite big, so detail was difficult. When it came time to create Tapper, I decided to bring Domino Man over to the new game," says Scott Morrison. "It was fun for me because he was a lot bigger in *Tapper*, which allowed me to give him a wider range of emotions and reactions. Domino Man also made an appearance as a lumberjack in *Timber*, and as a pimped-out wrestling manager in *Battle Royale* for the TurboGrafx 16 home console." Steve Meyer says the main character was "modelled after the toy designer Mike Ferris, so it was easy to imagine him in the game. He was very happy to be featured in *Tapper*. Unfortunately, Mike Ferris passed away a few years ago," recalls Steve Meyer with sadness.

As well as being the star of an arcade classic, Mike Ferris was a talented artist and designer who taught Scott Morrison how to use the art tools. His presence in *Tapper* means that, at least in some form, Mike Ferris will live on forever.



THE MAKING OF… TAPPER



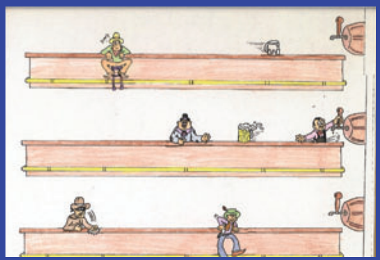


ALCOHOL-FREE ZONE

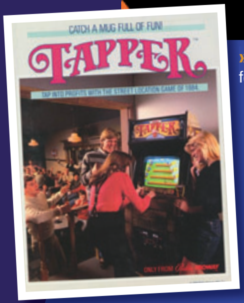
Once the popularity of *Tapper* was assured among beer-guzzling adults, it was only a matter of time before an alcohol-free version emerged. "At first it was a street piece but then Midway wanted to put it in the arcades so asked us to do a root beer version. We changed the cabinet decoration and Scott did new graphics," says Steve Meyer. Scott Morrison explains a little further: "I reworked the backgrounds with all new colours and logos, and gave Domino Man a new soda-jerk-themed outfit, complete with a little white hat. I remember the red-and-white-striped shirt gave me a lot of trouble when animating, since the stripes had to move without looking choppy." But was the game difficulty altered for the younger market? "Nah," laughs Steve Meyer. "The kids were better at it than everyone else.".



» [Arcade] "It's a great sobriety test to follow the right can," says Scott Morrison.



» The early concept artwork used to pitch the concept of *Tapper* to Midway.



dancers. Once we went punk it was pretty easy to make the bar itself look disheveled and half-destroyed. The space bar was meant to be a cool surprise to players who were good enough to reach that advanced level. We hoped that players would spread the word and entice others to get good enough to reach it. The aliens were fun to do. I think I made each one with an exaggerated facial feature – huge eyes, all mouth – and there was a little tiny one who walked on the bar. That one gave Steve a challenge because his sprites had to have different coordinate offsets than the rest of the patrons, but that was the great thing about working with Steve. Those little touches helped make the game memorable."

In order to create such distinctive artwork and sprites, Scott Morrison would use customized art-tool software with a rather impressive controller that had been created by Rick Hicaro. It was built from a *Gorf* handle with four phone buttons and a trigger, with an Atari joystick assembled on the top. "The tool sets were programmed by Elaine Hodgson (who is now my current boss and the CEO at Incredible Technologies), and it worked on Midway's MCR II three-board system. The sprite tool gave me on-screen menus of the color palettes I could select from (16 sets of 16 colors), and the ability to flip, flop and rotate the 32x32 'hi-res' image. I could also sequence and assemble a few sprites to see how they looked when animating. The background art was half the resolution of the sprites, and everything had to be made from a set of 256 eight-by-eight blocks. I used a giant sheet of grid paper to draw the backgrounds and map out the various pixel patterns. It was a real trick to keep objects and images on block boundaries and figure out ways to re-purpose as many blocks as possible to get a lot of variety. Once I had my list of 256 blocks defined, I used the background art program to create and store each individual block. Once they were made they were burned to EPROMs, so I could sequence through them and build the actual background scene. If I missed a block or got something wrong, I would have to re-burn new EPROMs, so it was a tricky process." Regarding the *Gorf* controller, Scott Morrison recalls: "The wires were long enough for me to sit way back, with my feet up on the desk, if I wanted to. It was an awesome system."

The gameplay mechanics were the area that Steve Meyer focussed on in order to flesh *Tapper* out into more of a challenge. "It became a resource management problem and one of the first was 'is this enough to base a game on?' So I made it more difficult and upped it to demonstrate the progress. But I would still ask, 'Is there enough content? What about if a customer left a tip? It became the Greek factor – you had to decide if you had enough time to pick it up. We changed the characters for each level but this still didn't feel like enough, so we introduced the idea of the bartender shaking up cans of beer (all but one) and you had to keep an eye on the can or get sprayed with the beer. Before it was implemented, we had to see if it would be



» [Arcade] "Grabbing a tip was the trigger device that would spawn the dancing girls," explains Scott Morrison.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DOMINO MAN (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1983

TIMBER
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1984

BATTLE ROYALE
SYSTEM: TURBOGRAFX 16
YEAR: 1989



"We went into a room with beer and sodas and spent hours burping into a mic" SCOTT MORRISON

fun and it worked and it was nice to see people enjoying the game." The difficulty was the hardest area to get right and required plenty of tweaking. If you've ever played a level and wondered why it varied in difficulty, this was down to a deliberate programming technique. "I spent a lot of time playing with the customers, how fast you could serve beer to them and get it back. I had to play carefully with the difficulty when watching people play, and when some did better I had to add more difficulty. I also had to make it easy for people to play while holding a beer. I ended up with a system with a window and timeframe – if you were good at serving beer you could get patrons out quickly, but if not quick enough, they wouldn't get out for a while."

What made *Tapper* unique was the controller the game shipped with. Complete with a lever resembling a beer pump, it made serving alcohol not too dissimilar to the real occupation. "Bally Midway had a model shop – they had all the controller mechanisms. Midway manufactured those and they made a prototype version and got it right. It had a nice feel where it would spring right back which became essential so when you let it go, you would fling the beer. If you wanted to wait for the right time or want to throw them one, two, three at a time then you could do that. It gave you the chance to make a mistake and added a little bit of risk," remarks Steve Meyer.

One of the features that never made it into the final release was the inclusion of sound effects where each customer would burp upon consuming a beer. Needless to say, it was an idea that was better in theory than in its execution. "We were approached by Texas Instruments (I think it was TI, that was a long time ago) with a new audio chip that allowed for digitized sounds, and we thought that was really cool and cutting-edge," recalls Scott Morrison. "At one point, we went into a room with beer and sodas and spent a couple of hours burping into a microphone. When we installed the chip we tried a version that had the patrons burping after each beer they drank. It was pretty funny, but got really gross and irritating pretty quickly and we didn't think Bud would go for it. We tried to tone it down and use the burp sounds occasionally, but it didn't have the impact we wanted so we scrapped the idea."

Since the days of *Tapper*, both Meyer and Morrison have remained in the games industry, although they work in entirely different sectors. "Since 1987 I have been with Incredible Technologies, currently the largest manufacturer of coin-operated videogames. Early on, we decided to follow the path that *Tapper* began and focus on games for adults in street locations like bars and pubs. *Golden Tee Golf* is our biggest hit, which is celebrating its 21st year, an unprecedented feat," remarks Scott Morrison. Steve Meyer is at Firaxis as "director of software development, making games for all different systems, the most recent one being *Civilization Revolution*." Cheers guys… have a Bud on us.





» Scott Morrison used this *Gorf* handle-powered controller to draw the in-game visuals for *Tapper*.



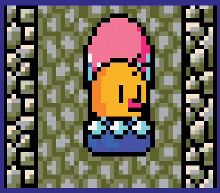
» [Arcade] There was also a Suntory-sponsored version that differed only in the background logo and colour of liquid.



THE CLASSIC GAME

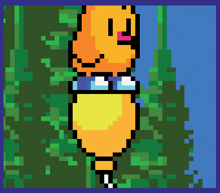


When Tiki the Kiwi's pals get enslaved by a nefarious leopard seal called Wally outside Auckland Zoo, it falls to the brave little tyke to grab his bow and arrow and embark on one of the most insufferably cute and peculiar platform adventures of the Eighties. But before we continue, we'd just like to point out that no animals were harmed in the making of the feature… well, maybe just a few.



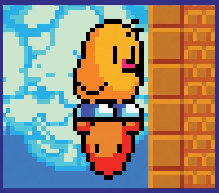
HOT AIR BALLOON

This is Tiki's default mode of transport. If he gets killed while airborne, he gets respawned inside this colourful balloon, and given brief invulnerability. Note how Tiki's head is the same size as the balloon.



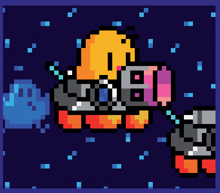
BALLOON

While balloons make Tiki a larger, more vulnerable target, they can absorb four hits before exploding. Also, Tiki has the choice to either grab hold of the string or balance on top of the balloon.



ANGRY SHEEP HEAD

We're not sure what these are – they look like fried sheep heads. Whatever they are, they frequently appear in the game. Nippier than the balloons, they can only take one hit.



FLYING SAUCER

The Rolls Royce of *TNZS'* fleet of aerial contraptions is the Flying Saucer. They crop up rarely, so when you see one it's best to hop into it quickly. Not only are they nippy, but they fire a powerful laser too.



DUCK

The ducks are a good all-round mode of transport. They feel faster than the other 'vehicles', but this added speed comes at a price; at times they can be a little skittish and a struggle to control.

WHY IS IT A CLASSIC?



The lunacy of it all

One of the most excellent elements of *The New Zealand Story* is the sheer amount of variety, hidden secrets and features Taito crammed into the game. As well as gifting a fine selection of weapons to our unflappable hero (Tiki can upgrade her standard bow-and-arrow attack for bombs, a laser gun and even a fireball-launching cane that looks like a half-eaten pretzel), he can make use of various modes of aerial transport to get around (very useful too, seeing that Kiwi are flightless). Often dropped by fallen enemies, transport plays an integral role in helping Tiki get around, and this helps the game feel unique.

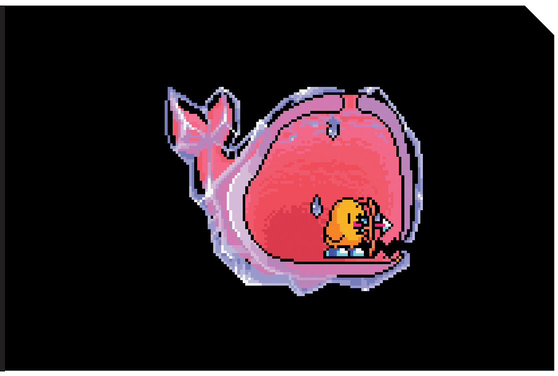
BEST POWER-UP



Invincibility

We were tempted to go with the *Chase HQ*-style nitro, which affords Tiki the power of heightened speed. It's pretty funny too; witnessing the little yellow tyke dart round the screen like a moth in a light bulb-testing factory. However, being an arcade game from the Eighties, *The New Zealand Story* is also one incredibly difficult nut to crack. One hit unfortunately spells the end for our hero, so sometimes speed isn't your greatest ally. So, instead we opted for good ol' invincibility, as it can often feel like a godsend. It also lasts a surprisingly long time, allowing you to make quite a bit of headway through the level.

BEST BOSS



Whale of a time

One of the best aspects about *The New Zealand Story* is the range of memorable bosses that Tiki encounters during his adventure. While we were strongly tempted to plump for the game's final boss here, Wally, we instead settled for his complete polar opposite (in a game position sense anyway). We have a bit of a soft spot for the first boss in *TNZS*. What can we say? We're smitten for cartoon whales encased in ice that swallow you whole, and then try to hurt you using the condensation dripping from in their stomachs. It's an easy fight too; simply stick the Whale's stomach lining with arrowheads until he turns to soap.

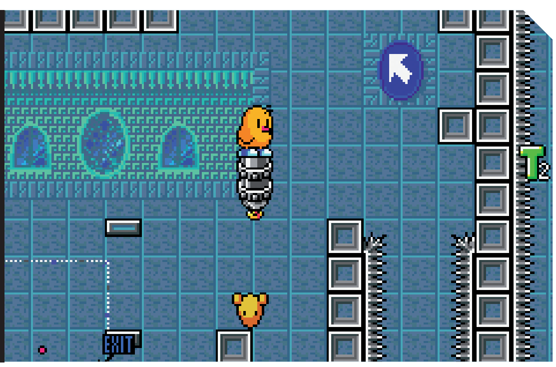
STANDOUT MOMENT



Heaven is a place on New Zealand

Helping to fuse a bit of replay value into the game, Taito added a large number of hidden secrets for players to discover. Perhaps the most memorable is the bizarre segment that occurs whenever Tiki snuffs it on later levels and his soul floats up delicately into heaven (you can tell it's heaven because the words 'welcome to heaven' flash up). Once he arrives, players can either negotiate a tricky platform bit – which ends the game in a poignant end scene – or, if they can find the secret exit, send Tiki straight back to Earth to find Wally, complete his mission and save his pals.

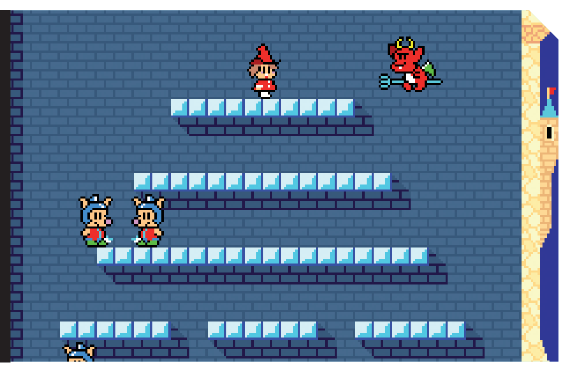
BEST MECHANIC



Kiwi GPS

One thing that does help *TNZS* stand out from its peers is the structure of the levels – which essentially places the exit (denoted by a caged Kiwi) indiscriminately on oblong-shaped stages, rather than asking you to simply make your way from one end of the level to the other. To help you find the exit, the game's backgrounds provide plenty of signage showing you the best route through the chaos. Furthermore, you also get a nifty Kiwi-GPS thing at the bottom left of the screen showing the player where they are in relation to the exit, giving you some idea of how devilishly clever the level design in the game really is.

RANDOM BIT OF TRIVIA



Kind of a predecessor, but not really

In 1985, three years before the release of *The New Zealand Story*, Taito released a game with a spookily similar name. Titled *The Fairytale Story*, the game plants you in the role of a cartoon witch, and actually shares more similarities with Taito's *Bubble Bobble* series than *The New Zealand Story*. However, there are parallels between the two games. Firstly, attacking enemies turns them into food (in *Fairytale*'s case cake rather than fruit) and, like *TNZS*, if you dawdle too long on a level, an annoying devil character appears that chases the player and kills them instantly.



What the press said… ages ago

Your Sinclair 93%

The New Zealand Story has got a character all its own. It's as funny, addictive, pleasingly put together and playable as you can get. It's the nearest thing I've played at home to the arcade classic *Mario*, and I'm giving it a Megagame whether you like it or not.

Crash 91%

Ocean has come up with another surefire hit. The conversion of *The New Zealand Story* is top-notch, with accurate character graphics, plenty of sound and masses of addictive playability.

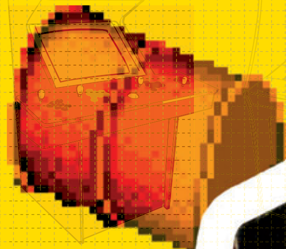
What we think

The game still holds bags of charm and appeal today, so it's little wonder it garnered much love from reviewers back in the day. There are some really nice ideas at play in *TNZS* and it boasts some terrific home conversions too.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** ARCADE
- **PUBLISHER:** TAITO
- **DEVELOPER:** TAITO
- **RELEASED:** 1988
- **GENRE:** PLATFORM
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £200-300 DEPENDING ON CONDITION

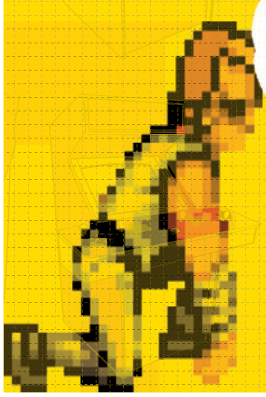




IN THE KNOW

- **» Name:** Double Dragon
- **» Released:** 1987
- **» Publisher:** Taito
- **» Developer:** Technos Japan
- **» Price:** £150+
- **» By The Same Developer:** Renegade





COIN-OP CAPERS

#5 Double Dragon

We take a definitive look back at a classic arcade game and unravel its brilliance with the help of those who know it best



When Technos unleashed the spiritual successor to *Renegade* in 1987, it changed the scrolling fighter forever. While the ability to beat your way through various locations was nothing new to arcade dwellers, *Double Dragon* was the first title that enabled you to deliver cold street justice with a friend, by putting you in the capable hands of either Billy or Jimmy Lee.

Starting off with the iconic kidnapping of current squeeze Marian – a moment made doubly memorable by the showing of her panties as she's unceremoniously carried away by Big Boss Willy and his gang – a garage door lifts up and the two Lee brothers leap into action. It's a truly classic moment that will be forever scorched into the mind of any who witnessed it.

While *Double Dragon* only features four levels, the path to Marian is fraught with danger, and the brothers must despatch a huge gang of goons in order to retrieve their precious prize. Most of the grunts they face are just that, requiring little more than a few deft punches and kicks to the head in order to continue, but before long the brothers face their first true adversary: Bolo, a gigantic strong man with fists the size of hams and an amazing quickness at odds with his huge size.



Other adversaries included whip-cracking ladies of the night, a nattily attired thug who went by the unassuming name of Jeff but had all the vicious moves of the Lee brothers and Big Boss Willy himself, and was the only enemy in the game to wield a firearm; in this case a deadly machine gun that would instantly rob you of all your energy if you were hit by it.

To further enhance the difficulty of the Lee brothers' quest, their many foes had access to a variety of different weaponry, ranging from knives to sticks of dynamite. Baseball bats, whips and even crates and barrels could be used to get the drop on the brothers, meaning that even weaker thugs like Williams and Roper could be more than a handful if they started outnumbering you.

Luckily, the brothers were just as adept at using the many weapons that were littered around the four stages, and also came equipped with a dazzling array of moves to further give them the upper hand. Obviously styled on the successful layout that had worked so well in *Nekketsu Koha Kunio-kun* (or *Renegade*, as it was known in the West) the *Double Dragon* arcade cabinet employed a three-button setup that allowed the siblings to pull off flying kicks, elbows and even a devastating head butt – a move that, along with the aforementioned elbow attack, could make *Double Dragon* rather easy to complete.

Add in bright colourful, cartoony visuals that were a world away from the grungy style of *Renegade* – but more in keeping with *Nekketsu Koha Kunio-kun* – with excellent animation and a wondrously moody soundtrack, and it should come as no surprise to learn that Technos's game took the arcades by storm. One of its masterstrokes, however, and a sequence that has been rarely bettered, is when Big Boss Willy is finally defeated. If you're playing with a friend you then have to battle them to see who will earn Marian's heart. It's a marvellous little touch that added further to Technos's unique fighter. Numerous sequels and spin-offs quickly followed, while the original game *Dragon* was ported to a staggering number of systems, although few of them actually did it justice.

Double Dragon may have been eclipsed by a whole range of better fighters – *Final Fight*, *Turtles*, *X-Men* – that quickly built on all the key components that had worked so well for Technos, but it remains a truly remarkable little fighter that can still hold its own. Technos, we salute you. *





COIN-OP CAPERS

the expert



With the world champion currently in hiding, we speak to David Nelson. He might not have the current high score, but he still knows a thing or two about Tecnos's superb scrolling fighter

PROFILE

» **Name:** David Nelson
» **Age:** 36
» **Date of birth:** 18 January 1974
» **Hometown:** Laconia, New Hampshire
» **Current World Records:** "Currently I hold 42 world records. Some of my favourite or most significant are on *Canyon Bomber*, *Clowns*, *Frogs*, *Hard Drivin'*, *Sky Diver*, *Spectar* and *Wheels*."

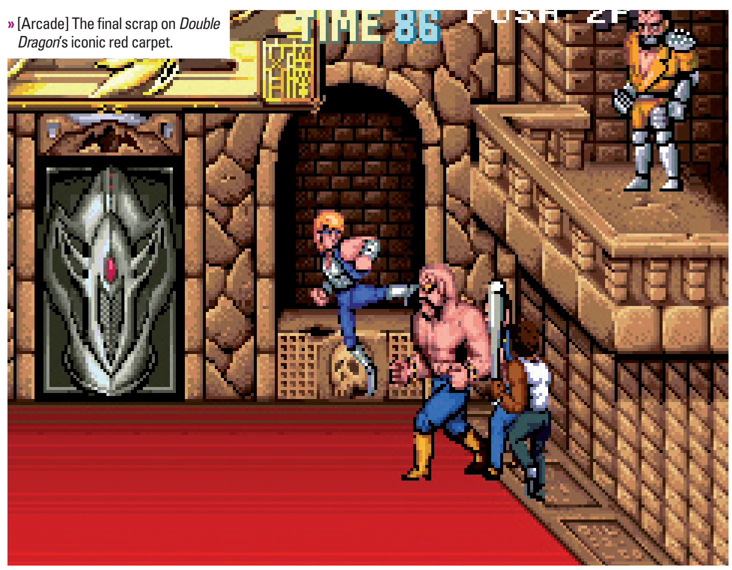


■ When did your interest in *Double Dragon* begin?
I remember playing *Double Dragon* when I was a kid. My local arcade had it – as a matter of fact, my local arcade back in the day was Funspot, located in Weirs Beach, New Hampshire. Funspot is one of the few arcades from back in the day that still remains today, and has now been recognised officially as the largest arcade in the world. Not a bad arcade to have as your stomping grounds growing up, and it's certainly one of the reasons I became a gamer!

■ What is your favourite stage in the game and which is the trickiest to complete?
My favourite stage in the game is probably the first. There aren't too many enemies to contend with so you can have fun with them, and I always liked trying to perfectly time kicking the knife that one of the guys throws at you, and then beating the boss of that level and trying to take the oil drum with you to the next stage. There are lots of enjoyable little quirks.

Actually, now that I think about it, my very favourite part of the game is when you complete a two-player game. Because once you beat the last boss to finish the game… you get to fight each other! Trying to fight another human is a totally different animal than beating up the mindless computer-controlled thugs that the game throws at you.

■ Why did you decide to attempt a high score?
I've got to be honest: my score is only fourth on the scoreboard, and I believe that score represents simply me going through the game on one credit from start to finish. It was not necessarily a high-score attempt, and I was not attempting to break the record; I just wanted to get a good solid score on a game I had always enjoyed, and knew that I was good enough to at least finish the game on one coin.



» [Arcade] The final scrap on *Double Dragon*'s iconic red carpet.

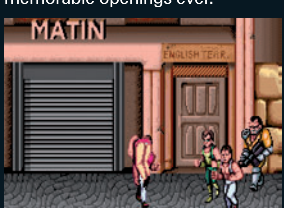
■ How much different is playing *Double Dragon* on MAME compared to the arcade?
Personally, I don't play many games on MAME, particularly *Double Dragon*. Although I do own a Hot Rod arcade controller for use with MAME, I don't have it hooked up at all times. Usually when I play MAME it's just for a quick fun game, and I don't bother going all-out by hooking up the arcade stick. So I'll just use the keyboard, and in that case it's not very enjoyable playing a game like *Double Dragon* on a keyboard! It's difficult to pull off the moves.

■ You're currently placed fourth on the Twin Galaxies leaderboards. Will you be attempting to get higher any time soon?
I might make an attempt at increasing my score sometime; perhaps just to break 100,000 points. But I currently don't have any plans to try to break the record. I'm so busy that it's difficult to find time to

Magic Moments

Life on the streets isn't easy, but it certainly has some memorable moments

The Opening
A swift punch to the gut, a flash of knicker and *Double Dragon* starts off with one of the most memorable openings ever.

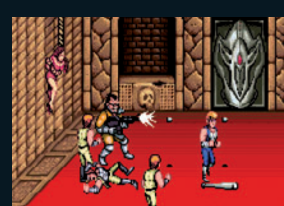




Gate Crasher
When this steroid-injected muscleman smashes his way through a stone wall, you certainly tend to remember it.

Knife Kick
Knives are dangerous weapons, robbing you of large amounts of energy. Time a kick and you can deflect them away.





Gunning for trouble
Surrounded by his toughest henchmen and sporting a deadly machine gun, Big Boss Willy is much more than an amusing name.

Brotherly Love
With Willy defeated, the brothers have a vicious fight to earn Marian's love, despite the fact that she's already Billy's girl.



play the games I enjoy, even for just a few minutes, let alone finding the time to hone my skills enough to attempt breaking a record.

■ What's the most important advice you could give?
It's one thing to know how to play *Double Dragon*; it's completely another to be good at it. *Double Dragon* is one of those games that's fun to just pick up and play, but to play it well, and to the level it takes to have a shot at breaking the Twin Galaxies world record [currently held by Jason Wilson of Anaheim, California, with a score of 151,210], that takes a great deal of skill and mastery of the game. The most important thing is that different moves award different points. Sure, you can pretty much go through the whole game elbowing guys, but it's not worth much in the way of points. There's one particular move that's worth a whole lot of points, and if you can maximise using it on as many enemies as you can throughout the whole game, you'll end up with a whole lot of points! I wont divulge the secret entirely, but it's not easy to pull off and requires exact timing. It's especially hard to execute on the bosses, and could cost you serious damage if done incorrectly.

■ Are you attempting any high scores on any other games?
Most of my time is occupied by Twin Galaxies work, in helping to crown world champion gamers. When I have a bit of free time to play some games, it's usually just for enjoyment, and that means a few songs on *Guitar Hero* or *Rock Band*, or some *Wii Sports Resort*. I may attempt to set a record on some of my favourite songs, but there's nothing driving at me to get it done. Because I've made videogaming my work, when I do play games for pleasure, it's usually only for my own personal enjoyment. I do try to maintain a good number of world records on some of the much older monochrome games; that seems to be my niche – a friend once nicknamed me 'Monochrome Bitch'. I have a propensity to succeed at these old gems, and I appreciate their simplicity. These old games break down gaming talent to its raw components of skill and timing, and for the most part they require extreme concentration to achieve a world record score.

■ If someone beat your current score, would you attempt to reclaim it?
Many of the high scores I have, I am not interested in fighting to retain, and wouldn't bat an eye if someone were to best my score; I would probably share in their joy. However, as I'd like to remain the reigning monochrome champ, those scores I will – and have – defended. *

DAVID'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

Expert tips from the expert on how to amass those record-breaking, Twin Galaxies-shaking scores

1 **■ POINTS MATTER**
Find the attack moves that are worth the most points, and use them as much as possible. Do this through a whole game, and you could be a new world record holder.

2 **■ ENERGY ISSUES?**
When your health is in jeopardy, go back to the old standby: the easy elbow move. Keep in mind that when you beat a stage, your current health bar is replenished, so don't worry about conserving energy for the next stage.

3 **■ MOVES MATTER**
Recognise the way enemies approach you. Don't just fight toe-to-toe. When a baddie comes at you sideways, let them get close, then shuffle up or down a bit, and let him/her slide vertically towards you and bust 'em up with a great attack when they line up with you.

4 **■ NO WEAPONS**
Avoid weapons! They're just a pain in the ass! Sometimes you might even pick up a weapon by accident, and unfortunately the only way to drop it is to take a hit.

5 **■ STAY AWAY**
If you can make it all the way through the game to the last boss, watch out because he's packing some serious heat in the form of a machine gun. NEVER line up or cross his horizontal line, or you will get shot and lose that life instantly.

the sequels

Double Dragon's popularity ensured follow-ups galore...



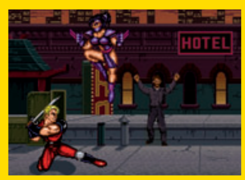
Double Dragon II: The Revenge
Released: 1988
In a delicious twist, the Lee brothers save Marion, only for her to get gunned down in *II*'s opening. Still, at least it gave them a chance to go for bloody revenge.



Double Dragon III: The Rosetta Stone
Released: 1990
Despite the addition of a third player, Sonny, and a shop where items could be purchased, *The Rosetta Stone* marked a downslide for the series.



Super Double Dragon
Released: 1992
Released exclusively on the Super Nintendo and Technos's last *Double Dragon* release before it went bankrupt, *Super Double Dragon* is one of the best games in the series.



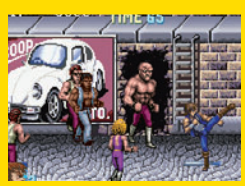
Double Dragon V: The Shadow Falls
Released: 1994
The fifth outing was a world away from the previous capers. Developed by Leyland Interactive Media, this was a competent one-on-one fighter.



Double Dragon
Released: 1995
Many ignore this Neo Geo game in favour of more popular brawlers, but it remains a solid fighter and a strong addition to the series, with slick animation and impressive mechanics.



Battletoads & Double Dragon: Ultimate Team
Released: 1993
This spin-off by Rare saw the brothers team up with its popular amphibians. Although a *Battletoads* game at its core, there's nevertheless plenty to enjoy.



Double Dragon Advance
Released: 2003
While this mimics the arcade original, there are enough new additions and levels to treat *Double Dragon Advance* as a separate title. It breathed new life into the 16-year-old game.

the machine

We chat to electronic engineer Chris Bodicoat, who has recently started restoring his import Double Dragon cabinet





Hi, I am Chris Bodicoat, an electronics engineer from Leicestershire

Double Dragon has always been a huge arcade favourite of mine, and I could only dream of owning something like this in the Eighties. Luckily, now this has become a reality.

My school friend Matt and I played *Double Dragon* every Saturday in Leicester. The arcade is still there to this day, though I doubt there are any games there now. We soon got good using the old elbow move, getting to the end on 20p each, meaning good playtime for the money.

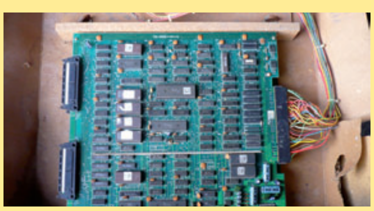
Double Dragon set new standards in the genre, and who could forget having to fight each other at the end to win the girl's heart?

ARTWORK

The artwork is Americanised, with 'Hammer' and 'Spike' looking nothing like their original Japanese counterparts Jimmy and Billy Lee, as seen on this Technos advertising card.



THE BOARD

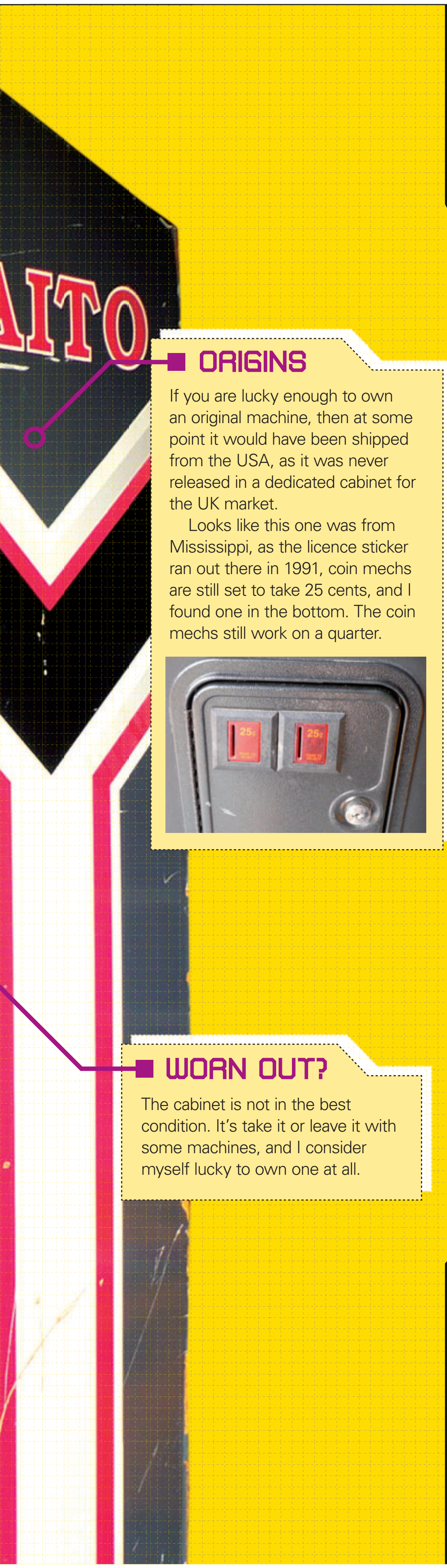


It's quite an unusual dedicated machine. While being wired to standard JAMMA with three buttons, it also has a drawer at the bottom, which makes it very easy to unplug the original board and play any other JAMMA games. For me it's *Double Dragon II* and *Renegade* in this machine

TREASURE

I have already had to replace the bottom, back and front of the machine, and no artwork is available that I've seen, so it will stay as is now. I like machines to be as original as possible, and they need to show some signs of once being played in an arcade – makes it more authentic. While working on it, I tried to work out what this other artwork that I found inside was; looks like they used some old bits of wood from *Operation Wolf* to make the cabinet.





ORIGINS

If you are lucky enough to own an original machine, then at some point it would have been shipped from the USA, as it was never released in a dedicated cabinet for the UK market.

Looks like this one was from Mississippi, as the licence sticker ran out there in 1991, coin mechs are still set to take 25 cents, and I found one in the bottom. The coin mechs still work on a quarter.

WORN OUT?

The cabinet is not in the best condition. It's take it or leave it with some machines, and I consider myself lucky to own one at all.

developer Q&A

Coder David Leitch explains why his 8-bit ports weren't as good as they could have been

Retro Gamer: How did you get to work on *Double Dragon*?
David Leitch: I dropped out of Manchester University and got a job at Binary Design, and *Double Dragon* was my first project there. I wasn't settled at university and I think the videogame bug had bitten me, so I decided to pack in my course and become a professional games programmer. And I've worked in the games industry ever since.

RG: How long did the conversion take to complete? How many of you worked on it?
DL: I think it took about three or four months. On the Spectrum team, there was me doing the programming, a couple of guys doing the artwork, and the sound effects were twiddled together by another programmer.

The Spectrum version was developed using a Tatung Einstein, hooked up to the target machine via some sort of serial cable connection. The Einstein had a proper keyboard and a reliable disk drive long before the Spectrum did, so it was used kind of like a poor man's PC.

RG: Were you familiar with the coin-op before you started the project?
DL: Not really. I'd seen it in the arcades, but I hadn't played it much before I started working on it, though I did end up playing it a lot then.

RG: What was the biggest difficulty you faced while working on it?
DL: It was a big game for the time, and the coin-op's hardware was much better than the Spectrum's. Plus I was still learning my trade and figuring out how to do lots of things.

The main problem with Spectrum development, in general was that there was no hardware graphics support – no hardware sprites or scrolling. So everything had to be done in software, but with a processor that didn't have a lot of poke.

Also, the game had to work on a basic 48K system, so we were always scrabbling around for ways of saving memory. So, for example, the black characters are the same sprites as the white characters, but drawn with a routine that inverted their pixels. All things considered, it could have turned into an ordeal, but I really enjoyed the whole experience.



RG: Did you have any support from Technos?
DL: No. We didn't have the source code or any of the assets from the coin-op, but that wasn't unusual back then. I'm not sure if it was because the licensor didn't want to give them up, or the management teams at Binary and Mastertronic hadn't asked for them.

So the 'conversions' were actually 'look and feel' rewrites. Hence myself and the rest of the team spending lots of time playing the arcade game, as it was the only way to figure out how everything was supposed to work.

RG: Were you sent an arcade cabinet?
DL: Yep. That was the one and only point of reference. It sat in the corner of the office and, thankfully, it had a DIP switch so you could set for infinite credits. Sadly, I didn't get to keep it. It was carted away at the end of the project and I'm not sure what became of it.

RG: How do you think your version stacks up?
DL: Ahem… Not very well. The Spectrum version would not be flattered by a side-by-side comparison. I looked at a movie of it on YouTube recently and it would be a struggle to pick out its good points. It looks rather ugly and plodding.

We tried to get as many of the original features in as possible, like the two-player option. That was quite novel for a Spectrum game, but I thought we had to do that; otherwise it wouldn't have been *Double Dragon*. But I had to spend too much time figuring out how to implement the features, and there wasn't a lot left over to make them any good. Somebody with more experience could have done a better job, because they'd have got through the basic technical issues quicker.

RG: The Spectrum version wasn't that well received. How did you feel about this?
DL: I think it got the reviews it deserved! On a personal level, I was happy just to have got it done. And I think it was considered to be a success by the people at Binary and Mastertronic. Cynical though it might sound, the most significant expectation the publisher had was that it made it into the shops for Christmas.

RG: What's it like working on conversions compared to original ideas?
DL: I think the best thing about those types of project was that it was totally clear what everybody wanted out of them. On a creative level, you knew that the closer you got to the original, the happier everyone would be. If you managed to exceed people's expectations relative to the hardware you were working with, then all the better.

The thing that worked out best for me was *Mortal Kombat II* on the Mega Drive. I did that in the first half of 1994. Improbable though it might sound, the team size for that project was about the same as for Spectrum *Double Dragon* and it was made in about the same amount of time. But we did have some advantages: we had access to the original source code and artwork, the console hardware wasn't quite so primitive compared to the arcade machine, and I had more of a clue what I was doing by then.

COIN-OP CAPERS
the conversions

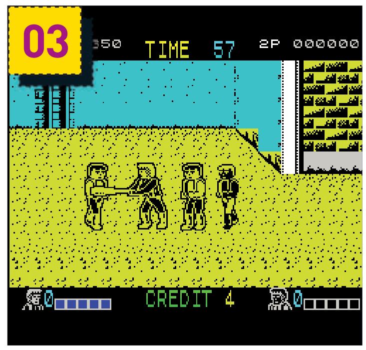


It's a sad fact of life, but there aren't any killer versions of Double Dragon. Don't believe us? Here's the proof















01. Master System
(Best Version)

It features some flickery sprites, but we still feel that this is the best home version. It features similar visuals to the NES, adds a second player, includes every weapon, and even sounds decent. It's tougher than its NES counterpart, but this remains a polished effort.

02. Atari Lynx

While the main sprites are well-animated, this handheld effort still has plenty of issues. Everything is too zoomed in, allowing you to see very little action, while the controls feel extremely clunky.

03. Spectrum

While not the worst version of *Double Dragon*, this Spectrum effort is certainly the poorest 8-bit computer offering due to its agonisingly slow pace; lumpy, deformed-looking sprites; and sluggish controls. There is a two-player mode, though.

04. Game Gear

Any *Double Dragon* game that allows you to pick up a gun within two seconds of playing is missing the point. Yes, it looks rather nice, but the horrid animation, annoying collision detection and scant references to the original arcade game makes this one to leave well alone.

05. Atari ST

All the home computer versions of *Double Dragon* were rushed, and the 16-bit ports were no exception. While the backgrounds are impressive, the main sprites range from fair to truly mediocre recreations of the originals. Combat is a little faster than the 8-bit offerings, but this is far from perfect.

06. Commodore 64
(Melbourne House)

Neither Commodore 64 version of *Double Dragon* is worth getting excited about, but Melbourne House's effort is definitely the one you should be avoiding. Yes, it features two players, but lots of moves are missing, the visuals are disappointing, and hardly any of the weapons appear. Rubbish.

07. NES

Now we really like the NES version. Yes, the omission of the second player is a complete travesty, but Technos at least packed it with as many new features as possible. There are new levels, including a face-off against your brother Jimmy as the Shadow Boss, the ability to fight against the computer or another player in a one-on-one, and you can even earn new moves by collecting hearts. The collision detection is iffy, but the slick visuals make this easily one of the best home ports.

08. Atari 7800

Now this is impressive. Granted, the sprites have a Lego look to them and its controls are a little unresponsive, but this remains a highly impressive port when you consider the base hardware. Audio is pretty poor, but the faithful sprites and backgrounds definitely impress. A surprisingly strong conversion.

09. Commodore 64
(Ocean)

Ocean's stab at *Double Dragon* is far more polished than Melbourne House's effort, but it's still far from perfect. Visually it's very well-detailed, with decent-looking sprites and authentic-looking backgrounds. Things we don't like, however, are the lack of a two-player mode and the fact that you can only jump by pressing the space bar, making combat difficult.

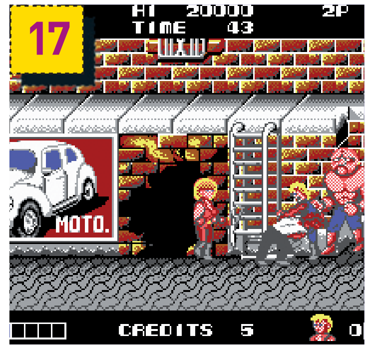
10. Amiga

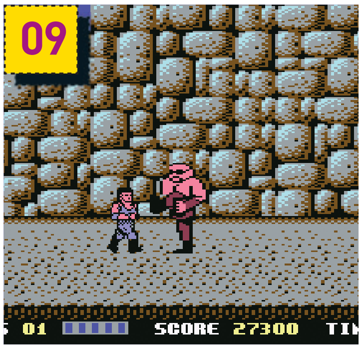
The Amiga version is nigh-on identical to the Atari ST port, so needless to say it's another version worth staying away from. It's another rushed port, with ropey animation, minimal sound and a single button for the game's many moves, making things









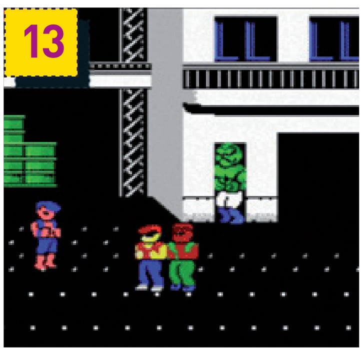


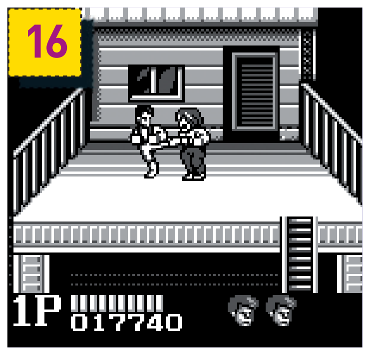














rather awkward. Another huge disappointment.

11. Amstrad CPC

(Melbourne House)

The most widespread version of *Double Dragon* on the CPC is also the worst. While it's extremely colourful and captures the cartoony visuals of the arcade game, it's let down by miserable controls, horrendously jerky scrolling and its slow pace. Avoid this and seek out Richard Aplin's version.

12. Mega Drive

Released in the US, this is by far the most authentic-looking home version of *Double Dragon* that's available. Visually it's fantastic, with great-looking sprites and backgrounds that are backed up by superb audio. Sadly, gameplay isn't up to the same high standard due to a frustrating difficulty level, unconvincing collision detection, and weapons that can be extremely tricky to pick up.

13. MSX

The MSX port, while rather colourful, is another missed 8-bit opportunity. Only the knife is available and there are hardly any moves on offer. Perhaps the strangest aspect of the MSX port, however, is that you only lose energy when knocked to the ground, meaning it's perfectly possible to get through the game with little effort. Bizarre.

14. Mobile

The mobile phone versions of *Double Dragon* were released in 2005. While the graphics and audio are excellent, these versions are let down by frustrating controls that make certain moves extremely hard to pull off. A pity, as they really do look nice.

15. Amstrad CPC

(Mastertronic)

This CPC6128 port of *Double Dragon* is ace considering the hardware and is easily the best of the 8-bit computers. While the visuals look a little weird – they were ported from the Amiga version by Richard Aplin – the fast pace and combat are superb. A really amazing port.

16. Game Boy

While it's not as arcade-perfect as we'd like, this is a fairly fun port that at least captures the spirit of the hit arcade game. The graphics look fairly good, combat is surprisingly decent on just two buttons, and it's even possible to link up for some two-player action.

17. PC

The EGA visuals do a pretty good job of capturing the spirit of the arcade game, but this is still another dire *Double Dragon* port. The biggest issue here is the frustrating, unresponsive controls; minimal number of weapons; and frustratingly high difficulty level. Another disappointing port.

18. Atari 2600

(Worst version)

You have to give Atari's machine a gold star for trying, but this is a hideous conversion. Indistinct graphics, atrocious sound and clunky gameplay combine to create a real stinker.

19. The others

While it wouldn't be fair to award the best conversion to either the Xbox Live Arcade or Game Boy Advance, they do both deserve a mention. The Live Arcade version is sadly no longer available for download but was an astounding port that featured both the original graphics and a new look. The GBA version is very rare and has slightly updated visuals and plenty of new levels and gameplay modes, making it the definitive version for those who want to track it down. A version of *Double Dragon* was also recently released on the Zeebo (pictured), a Brazilian console by Tectoy. Sadly, due to the games being downloadable, we've been unable to play it. It looks nice, though.

Special thanks to **Mike Siciliano** of the Double Dragon Dojo for his invaluable help in putting this article together

PUGGSY

WITH A FULLY-FLEDGED PHYSICS SYSTEM AND AN ECLECTIC ARRAY OF ITEMS TO RIVAL A SUNDAY CAR BOOT, PUGGSY WAS BEYOND THE SCOPE OF THE AVERAGE PLATFORMER. MATTHEW REYNOLDS TALKS TO JON BURTON ABOUT ITS DEMO ORIGINS AND THE POOR SALES THAT CRUSHED ANY HOPES OF A SEQUEL

■ Retro Gamer: Firstly, what was your position and prior experience before working on the game?
Jon Burton: I was responsible for the design of the game, and all the programming and level design. I had previously designed and programmed *Leander*. Since then, I have either designed or programmed 27 other titles, including the *LEGO* series of games starting with *LEGO Star Wars*, a couple of *Sonic the Hedgehogs*, a couple of *Crash Bandicoots* and a load of Pixar tie-ins.

■ RG: The project started life from a non-playable demo, correct?
JB: Psygnosis saw the 'Puggs in Space' demo and hired the guys who did it to make a full game for them. After a while they all realised that making a demo is one thing but making games is quite another, so they handed the project over to us to start again from scratch.

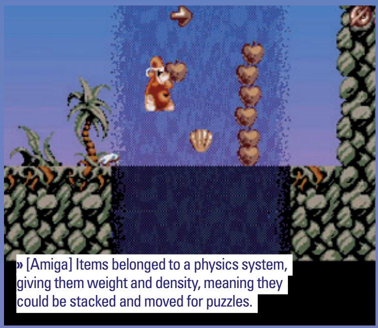
■ RG: Was it a complete overhaul? What did you keep?
JB: We scrapped everything except the main character, and changed his colour from red to orange to avoid the colour-bleed you got from TVs at the time. I wanted to make a game to compare with *Mario*, so it needed to be a platformer.

■ RG: So starting from scratch, where did you want to take the project?
JB: I was a huge fan of *Mario* (who isn't?) and wanted to take the concept of movable objects, like the spring from *Mario*, and expand that into a whole concept of multiple



» [Sega CD] The island setting featured a variety of environments, including beaches, forests, temples, lakes, towns and a secret-filled lighthouse.

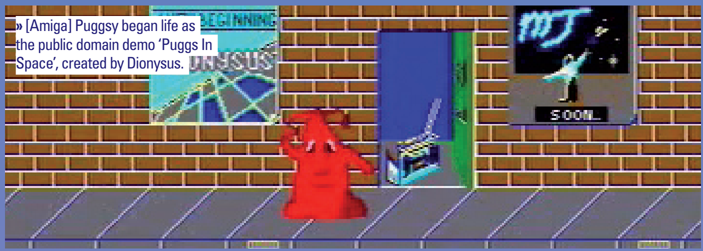




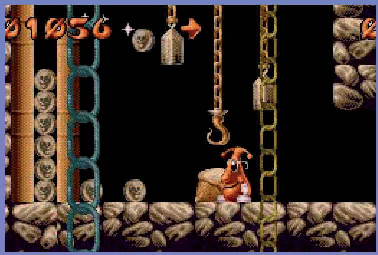
» [Amiga] Items belonged to a physics system, giving them weight and density, meaning they could be stacked and moved for puzzles.



» [Mega Drive] The first boss of the game, Polly Pirate, is defeated by flinging fish at him.



» [Amiga] Puggsy began life as the public domain demo 'Puggs In Space', created by Dionysus.



physics-based objects and all the gameplay that could be had by modelling objects with different weights, bounciness, properties, and so on.

■ RG: How did you implement the physics system?

JB: One system was programmed to control all the elements of the game, and all the gameplay was derived using that one system. No bespoke code needed to be written. For instance, if I wanted a creature to jump around, I could set parameters to jump every few seconds. If I wanted it to fly, I altered the parameters so it jumped more often and so it would simulate 'flapping' and start flying.

■ RG: It's also a visually impressive game, with a lot of technical trickery.

JB: The art style was very much based on the Japanese console games of the time. We jammed the game with innovative tech. Apart from the 'never before seen' physics system, we had boss levels which showcased full-screen rotation, full-screen scaling, a full particle system, a 3D filled-vector graphics system and a system to smoothly morph objects between various shapes - all on a standard Mega Drive. They were all firsts…

■ RG: Did any technical issues arise along the way?

JB: The physics system was difficult to program as it needed to run at 60 frames per second, but needed to be bulletproof (big problem if an object you need embeds in a wall). The other problem with the physics was getting the objects to stop moving correctly. The problems with objects 'jostling' around all the time when they were up against each other was so hard to solve at the time that for a while we added eyes to all the objects to explain why they were always moving around!

■ RG: How long did it take to develop *Puggsy* in total?

JB: From memory, around 16 months. The last six months I spent just making levels with the systems.

■ RG: The Sega CD had more FMV sequences, bosses and levels. Any reasons behind the extra content?

JB: There was more space to fill.

■ RG: What's the story behind the Junior mode? We do remember the game generally being quite difficult…

JB: The Junior level was added at the publishers request as they felt people needed a tutorial. The side effect of this was that people played the first couple of levels and thought it was just a basic platformer. In retrospect, we should have made the first levels easy but full of cool physics, so that people could quickly see what was unique about the game.

■ RG: What did the publisher think of the game?

JB: The publisher loved the concept, but it was their first foray into cartridge-based games and they misjudged the amount of money you needed to spend on advertising to get enough sales to offset the 'cost of goods' involved in making the cartridges. I think they spent something like £2 million on cartridges and £40,000 on marketing.

■ RG: How was the sales response?

JB: We really wanted to compete with *Mario*, but the game got lost in the wave of Mega Drive titles. It was generally received well by people who spent more than ten minutes playing it. Megatech gave it 90 per cent, MegaDrive Advance Gaming gave it 90, MM Saga gave it 89 and Console+ gave it 91 per cent. It didn't sell well, but I think the price was reduced so all the copies ended up in gamers' hands.

■ RG: Did this impact the chances of a sequel, or any other versions of the game coming out?

JB: The game ends by saying '*Puggsy 2* coming soon', but due to poor sales etc, etc. We also completed a SNES version of the game but it never got released. I am still trying to find a copy of it so we can put it out into the public domain.



IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** PSYGNOSIS
- **» DEVELOPER:** TRAVELLER'S TALES
- **» PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE, AMIGA SEGA CD
- **» RELEASED:** 1993
- **» GENRE:** PUZZLE-PLATFORMER
- **» EXPECT TO PAY:** £4+



PUGGSY'S PARTNERSHIPS

A number of Psygnosis titles were renowned for featuring cameo appearances from other games, and *Puggsy* was no different.

"For every two levels there was one hidden level, so a vast amount of hidden content," explained Jon. "One level had you vaporising the Fluffy Bunnies from *Wiz'n'Liz*, another had a version of *Space Invaders* where you had to shoot down Martyn Chudley (now director of Bizarre Creations) in his MR2."

Another secret area, titled Lee And Errr, contained nothing but the message: 'Leander is Galahad on the Megadrive; Try Cheat' referring to Burton's previous project *Leander*.

Unfortunately, despite the array of bonus content in the game, most were perhaps too hidden. "We had a lot of fun with them, but sadly very few people saw them," Burton explained.

Puggsy himself later featured in the Splat! minigame in *Wiz'n'Liz*.



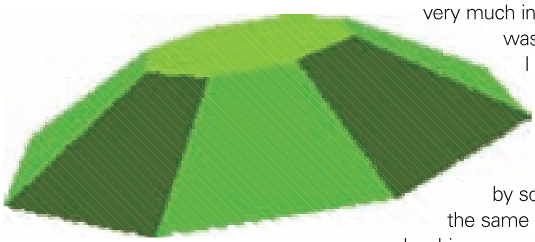
DAVID BRABEN

Elite. Need we go on? In 1984, David Braben co-created one of the best videogames ever made. Still topping polls today, the game's open-ended gameplay and 3D graphics were truly groundbreaking. In an exclusive interview with David Crookes, Braben reveals all

A QUARTER OF a century has passed since David Braben and Ian Bell sat down at Cambridge University to work on Elite. The game went on to shape videogaming as we know it, proving to be hugely influential for generations of developers. It was a seminal moment in gaming's short history and yet we cannot help but feel that, had this occurred in music or film, the mainstream media would have devoted more space to it. That didn't happen. But it was celebrated at GameCity in Nottingham, where Braben and Bell took to the stage to discuss the game's impact on their lives. David Crookes caught up with Braben to learn more about his life in videogaming to date.

RETRO GAMER: Let us start by going back to your days at school in the late Sixties and Seventies. Computers and gaming didn't really exist, so what were your aspirations back then?

DAVID BRABEN: At school I was very much into physics and that was my major passion. I enjoyed seeing how things worked and I also loved making things. I felt fascinated by science, but at the same time, I enjoyed unleashing my creativity.



RG: Were you considering a career in science back then?

DB: I liked the idea of being a research scientist. You know, looking into… well, lots of different things, I suppose. It was very interesting. I have also been fascinated with astronomy for a very long time. I am amazed at how little we understand the whole shebang. I mean, I look up into the sky today and I realise that it was only quite recently in historical terms that we had any idea of what kept the sun warm. And you know, we still don't understand gravity.

RG: Would it be fair to say that you have a natural instinct to explore and discover?

DB: I think so. There are a huge number of things that are out there that we have almost no comprehension of, you know? In fact, the things that we do have comprehension of are a very small percentage of what there is to understand.

RG: How did you get into the development of games?

DB: Well, I did sciences at university. I went to Cambridge to study natural sciences, which is specialising in physics, and in parallel I got a computer and started playing around with it. And I was fascinated by 3D graphics and put together various graphical things. I wanted to make a game because that seemed the best way to make use of graphics, if you see what I mean. It sort of started life as a hobby.

RG: But if gaming hadn't existed, do you think you'd have become an astronomer, perhaps?

DB: Quite possibly, yes, but you never really know. You know, if that hadn't… If games hadn't taken my fancy, maybe something else would. Personally, that was the path when I went to university that I was imagining I was going to go down.

RG: Can you remember the first time you played a game?

DB: Well it wasn't when I was a child because there were no such things at that time. When I went into the sixth form, games had just appeared in pubs and arcades. There were some *Space Invaders* cabinets from Taito – you know, the original *Space Invaders*. And then when I went to university, or maybe it was when I was still in the sixth form, I seem to recall seeing *Galaxian* and then *Pac-Man*.

RG: Did they fascinate you?

DB: The games then were very much centred around coin-operated machines. They weren't in the home. I remember a machine came out at the end of the Seventies, where you had these six games and a machine that you plugged into the television.



"I have been fascinated with astronomy for a long time. I am amazed at how little we understand the whole shebang"

MARTYN BROWN'S SOFTOGRAPHY

Elite 1984
Zarch 1987
Virus 1988
Conqueror 1990
Elite Plus 1991
Campaign 1992
Frontier: Elite II 1993
Campaign II 1993
Frontier: First Encounters 1995
V2000 1998
Elite: The New Kind 2001
Wallace & Gromit In Project Zoo 2003
Dog's Life 2003
RollerCoaster Tycoon 3 2004
RollerCoaster Tycoon: Wild! 2005
RollerCoaster Tycoon: Soaked 2005
Thrillville 2006
Thrillville: Off The Rails 2007
LostWinds 2008
Dark Horizon 2008
LostWinds: Winter Of The Melodias 2009

It would just make bleeps and it had rip-offs of *Pong*, *Breakout*, those sort of things. But, to be honest, computer games were just a hobby. They weren't as engaging as they are now, if that makes sense.

RG: So games didn't particularly grab you right from the start?

DB: These earlier games came along a bit late for me. I was already moving on by then, if that makes sense. I mean, we didn't have a computer at school until I was in the sixth form. But I was always fascinated by the sort of clever things that these machines could potentially do.

RG: It sounds as if you were more interested in how games were constructed rather than the games themselves…

DB: Yes. I quite enjoyed subjects like maths. I was a bit of a saddo at heart [laughs] but I remember seeing an advert for an Acorn Atom, and you had to buy it as a kit and put it together. I remember being fascinated by the idea that you could build a computer to do things and I got very excited that using very, very simple logical steps you could make something really complicated.

RG: Did this extend to your future in programming?

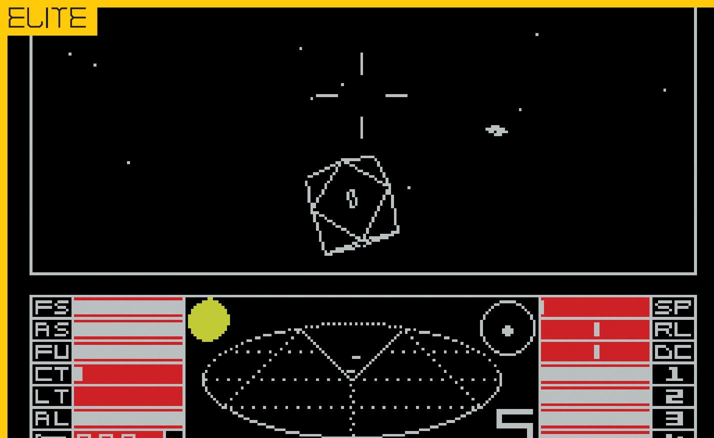
DB: When I was a lot younger I had Lego and the mindset of making really complicated things out of things that were quite simple was really exciting. I think that's what got me interested. I mean, the Lego had gear wheels with it and you could make really quite complicated machines out of what seemed quite simple things. And it's that same sort of fascination, I think, with programming – designing things that could be exciting – but at the same time a way of trying out different sorts of technological solutions to things.

RG: Given your love of physics and astronomy, it's little wonder that you created *Elite*…

DB: One of the very first things I wrote on a computer was an expanding star field. I wanted to actually be able to fly through a star field, and I remember writing this in BASIC. I was really crestfallen because I was expecting it to run really quickly because at the time I thought, 'Oh, it's only drawing a few

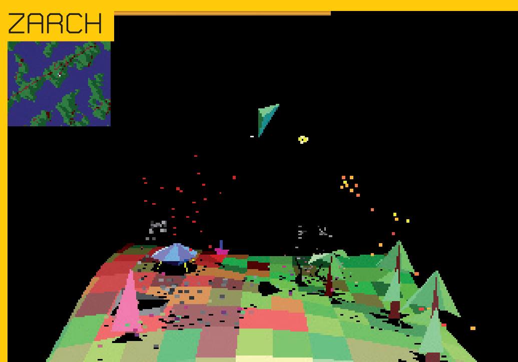
* FIVE TO PLAY

ELITE



VIDEOGAMING IS STILL a relatively young industry but we can say with conviction that no game has had the same impact as *Elite*. It wasn't just the wireframe 3D graphics that caused jaws to drop. The open gameplay – almost a space precursor to *Grand Theft Auto* in its ambition – made the game so utterly absorbing. Later titles such as *Eve Online* have taken obvious influence from Braben and Bell's Eighties gem, but *Elite* is all the more remarkable for having been put together in just 22K of code. And while so many games operated under the same restraints, few broke out with as much flair. Ironically, Braben says that videogaming has yet to begin. In that sense, he does his own game a major disservice.

ZARCH



BRABEN'S GAMING FOLLOW-UP to *Elite* was *Zarch*, another three-dimensional affair for the Acorn Archimedes, which went one better than *Elite* in that the wireframe graphics were advanced with solids. Gamers used the mouse to control a craft and it became popular in schools up and down the land – you might recall trying *Lander*, the demo upon which *Zarch* was built. Braben says that *Zarch* is his finest non-*Elite* game. It was a personal triumph for him. On other formats, the game was rebadged as *Virus*, but it lost little of its impact. *ACE* magazine scored it a whopping 979 out of a possible 1,000.

FRONTIER: ELITE II



WHEN YOU PRODUCE a game as exhilarating as *Elite*, then the pressure is undoubtedly on to produce a sequel that lives up to its predecessor. *Frontier: Elite II* was that sequel, created for the Amiga, Atari ST and PC but put together with limited help from Ian Bell. In our interview, Braben talks of his delight at being able to shape the game in his own way, but he didn't tinker massively with the formula. There was still no narrative to speak of and the gameplay was fundamentally the same. Some didn't like the real-world physics and felt it needed more action, but it sold in bucketloads and was a fine, playable successor.

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3



ALTHOUGH BRABEN WAS not involved in the actual production of *RollerCoaster Tycoon 3*, the game was one of Frontier Developments' massive hits. As gaming became more advanced, so team sizes increased. David began to take more of a management role, which, in our interview, he admits to preferring. The theme park simulation strategy game, *RollerCoaster Tycoon*, was developed by Chris Sawyer. He was a consultant on this third game, which was developed by Frontier. Sawyer had worked with Braben on conversions of *Virus* and *Frontier: Elite II*, and contributed to *Elite Plus* on the PC, making him an important part of Braben's success.

LOSTWINDS



BRABEN IS USED to making an impact, but even he did not foresee how important *LostWinds* became when it was released on the Nintendo Wii. It grew from an idea that won a Game of the Week competition at Frontier. Designer Steve Burgess was looking at ways to use the Wii Remote in a game and believed that a title in which players controlled the wind had potential. The game was released as a launch title for the WiiWare downloadable game service to amazingly positive reviews, and in 2009 a sequel was produced. It appears that Braben and his company still have the ability to amaze, even in today's hard-to-please society.

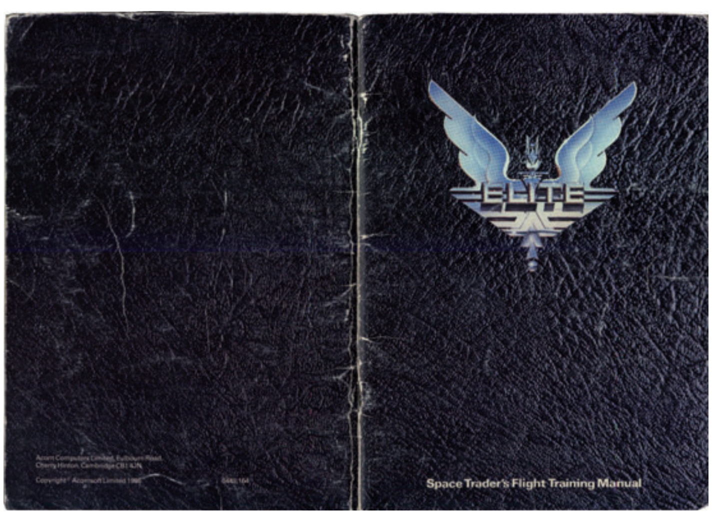
dots'. But you had to draw them again and again in a moving perspective and it took 10 or 20 seconds to draw them all up, so I was really disappointed. I was expecting it to be magical, you know; something really interesting to behold.

RG: Did you give up on BASIC?

DB: I started learning machine code. But I suppose the link between astronomy and gaming was ironic in that my very early program was driven by my astronomical interest.

RG: Was there something of a parallel between astronomy and programming? Were they both appealing because they allowed open-ended exploration and the pushing of boundaries, or is that a bit of a strained comparison?

DB: That's probably a bit strained. I think – and it's not just astronomy but most science – that there are actually great vast areas that we know pretty well nothing about or we have various sorts of understandings of to some degree, but they're not complete. And with programming, there's just the fascination of what you can do with it. It's like building a fantastic structure from bricks. Bricks are very simple but you can make amazingly complex structures, and I suppose one of the things I learnt then was that by very, very simple steps you can get things that appear to be extremely complicated. I don't know if you know about mathematic functions like the Mandelbrot set, but I remember being amazed at how, with such a simple equation, you can get such a complex outcome. I think it's a whole exciting, fascinating thing to do from a programming point of view. And what I'll say is that the things that I was fascinated with back in the Eighties in terms of computing still exist. I suppose all of this is what's behind the sort of things we know with the *Elite* galaxy.



RG: How did you get started on *Elite*?

DB: Well, I'd put a lot of time into playing around with 3D graphics and 3D spaceships, and how to draw them, and how to draw them very quickly, and then I met Ian Bell at university and he was working on a game called *Free Fall* with Acornsoft, and I thought, 'Oh, it would be excellent to make a game from this and publish it.' I showed him my spaceships flying around with sort of 3D star fields and things like that.

> "My early program was driven by my astronomical interest"



» David Braben picks up the Development Legend Award at the Develop Industry Excellence Awards in 2005.

RG: How receptive was he?

DB: He was very receptive. But the problem we had was that, fundamentally as a game, it would just be too empty, so we just, you know, we talked about how we could make it more interesting, have a galaxy to fly around trading and all that sort of thing, and that's where *Elite* was born. I mean, trading came from the need for an excuse, almost a justification for why the player was doing what they were doing. We didn't want a game that just took ten minutes to play.

RG: Did you feel it would be a success from the start?

DB: Well, we knew it wasn't similar to other games out there at the time and so when we came to getting the game to market, we started to struggle. We'd already been turned down by publishers and I think I've said a lot publicly about Thorn EMI rejecting the game. I think the point was the game was very different to what was out there and so we were confident that it was going to do really well.

RG: What was your biggest fear?

DB: I think really, certainly my biggest fear was someone else getting there first, doing a good 3D game before we did, and I was obviously delighted that it didn't happen. But it's one of those things that once it's there, I thought other people would see it and go, 'Oh wow. I will do one like that,' and we would just be one of many. I think we were very lucky in that we had the field to ourselves for quite a while.

RG: Can you take us through how you went about visualising *Elite*?

DB: We didn't really have any doubts about what we were doing because we were writing the game for ourselves and we were just hoping that there would be other people like us. That this was a game we would have liked to play was the point. The bigger doubts were either that we were going to get somehow ripped off, or someone else would do a similar game and come out before we did, you know, because why were we in any way special? We were lucky really. We thought maybe

someone else had started before us and kept it secretive.

RG: Was it difficult juggling programming with your studies?

DB: Yes, it was a challenge because the masters for *Elite* went off for duplication about a week before my end of final exams. So that was difficult balancing priorities.

RG: How did your friends react to the game and the time you spent on it?

DB: They probably thought I was an idiot, but nothing changes. I'm sure they still do. [laughs] Good friends were supportive. They just thought it was a bit of fun – you know, a job on the side. I think they were mostly critical actually, but in a good way.

RG: Did you envisage setting up a company when you first had the idea for *Elite*?

DB: No, the company came a lot later actually, because even after *Elite* and then several other games were released we worked with other people but worked with them as contractors rather than employees, you know, or a common company or whatever. And really the company came out of just the need to be able to put together a much bigger team and to sort of formalise it all.

RG: Without wishing to jump ahead too much, you also created *Zarch* for the Acorn Archimedes and you produced it in three months. Again it was 3D – are we right in saying that you're not interested in 2D?

DB: I was just really fascinated with 3D. And once I'd done it, I became very familiar with it. It was a very strong differentiator. Other people didn't have it, if that makes sense, so games with 3D stood well clear of the huge number of 2D games that were around.

RG: Do you still have a preference for 3D games?

DB: Yes, but it depends what for. The movement doesn't have to be in 3D, but the richness of the imagery benefits from it. I mean, even if you think of most 2D games, they're still fundamentally 3D. They're just someone who has drawn a 3D impression on a 2D square. In the same way much of the motion of *LostWinds* is 2D, it's still in a 3D world because it looks beautiful. I think there's a lot of false distinction made in many ways because most 3D games are 2D in terms of motion. You know, there's very little up and down in a lot of 3D games. You know, look at *Call Of Duty*: it's only just 3D in terms of motion. It's a fantastic game and no one would say it's not a 3D game, but it really depends what you do with it.

RG: So when you look back to 2D games such as *Jet Set Willy*, how did you view them?

DB: I found them very frustrating but quite fun. I remember… oh, what was it called? The one with the big duck flying around and little ostriches going up and down ladders.



RG: *Chuckie Egg*?

DB: *Chuckie Egg*, that's the one. You know, some of them were quite addictive and quite fun with interesting puzzle mechanics. But, it's a bit like saying to a chef, 'You like doing desserts. What about this?' I think there's space for all of them. I did enjoy a lot of them but I was very much more focused around 3D. And my heritage was around the BBC Micro. I didn't have a Spectrum until much later so I didn't really play any Spectrum games, so by and large I didn't get to grips with many of the 2D platformers that were well-known back then.

RG: Did you look at those games and think, 'I don't want lives. I don't want time limits'?

DB: Yes, these games didn't influence *Elite* directly; it was almost the opposite. What annoyed me with a lot of these 2D games is not that any one game was poor; it's just they were all very derivative of each other and they all had the same expected playthrough time – a huge frustration factor, which I thought was not necessary. You know, in other words, you'd do the same piece of gameplay over and over and over again until it ground you down or eventually you managed to succeed. It caused some problems – certainly some publishers, like Thorn EMI, were not ready for it, as they had an expectation for three lives, score, and ten-minute playthrough times.

RG: Do you think in some ways, then, that repetition has been bad for the reputation of gaming?

DB: I think it's a lot of the reason that many parents have an impression of games being very damaging, because some games are very repetitious. I mean, one of the beauties of looking at **Retro Gamer** now is most of the games that **Retro Gamer** refers to are the games that were really good at the time. I think we all tend to forget, much as, you know, the pop charts of the Seventies and Eighties were absolutely full of tat. There were lots of rubbish games around that we've forgotten about, which is maybe just as well.

RG: What was the worst game you played at that time?

DB: God, they all run together. I remember *Horace Goes Skiing*, thinking, 'Is that really the game?' I was quite shocked at how poor it was. There were a great many games that were okay, but there were just so many retreads of previous games. I would occasionally go into the shops to have a look at what was coming out and I thought, 'Wait up. That's the exact same gameplay mechanic as this other game. It's just they've changed the characters.' That was particularly the case with licences at that time. I'm trying to remember the exact ones. I remember the *Ghostbusters* licence stood out on the Commodore 64 as actually having some novel gameplay, but, in general, film games were really

> "Some publishers were not ready for it, as they had an expectation for games"



» David Braben gives a talk at GameCity in Nottingham, focusing on *LostWinds*. He is a regular at this annual event.

*NUMBER CRUNCHING

David was just **19** when he created Elite. Ian Bell was **20**

David is now in his **26th** year in the gaming industry

David married Katharin Dickinson in May **1993** in Cambridge

David was awarded the Development Legend Award by Develop magazine in **2005**

Elite was originally released in **3** versions: for the Acorn Electron Tape, BBC B tape and BBC B disk. It ended up on **17** different formats

Elite's universe contained **8** galaxies, with each galaxy containing **256** planets

Elite scored **5** stars in Beebug in **1984**

Ian Bell estimates that Elite sold **600,000** copies in total

Retro Gamer's poll to find the all-time top retro game in **2004** put Elite at number **1**

David employs more than **200** people at Frontier Developments



» Of all Braben's successes since 1984, his first game *Elite* still ranks as his number one.

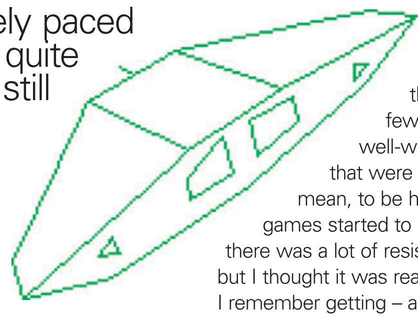
almost verbatim copies of other games but with different imagery attached. Yes, so I think there were a lot of quite poor games, as well as some very good ones.

RG: Such as?

DB: Well, by the late Eighties and early Nineties, I think there were a lot of good games. I remember *Populous* being a really nice breath of fresh air, and also, you know, prior to that, during the Eighties there were an awful lot of quite nice, clever mechanics. They're sort of isometric 3D games. They had some quite interesting puzzles.

RG: Do you think it was easy to make a game that stood out back then, given the repetition that you point to?

DB: Well, I don't think all the games were repetitive. I just think they would write a few that were. I think games today have something unique and memorable about them. When I think back, I really enjoyed *Defender*, from Williams. It was a very nicely paced game and quite difficult. It still fitted into the mould of other games with the sort of three lives, getting an extra one every now and again, but it felt different. The mechanic was different, the fact that the screen scrolled… It broke new ground.



RG: How has gaming changed today, do you think?

DB: We've now got a whole load of 3D shooters: first-person shooters. And the ones that really are memorable and stand out are the beautifully executed ones that often bring in new mechanics. I mean, compare *Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* with some of the other less successful games that are trying to do the same, in the same sort of arena. It's because *Call Of Duty* is doing such a good job of it. The same was true of the Eighties. You know, there were games that were essentially 'me too', and then there were a few conspicuous well-written games that were really lovely. I mean, to be honest, when games started to move into 3D there was a lot of resistance to it, but I thought it was really refreshing. I remember getting – a lot later now – *Mario 64* on the Nintendo 64, and I thought that was wonderful. That was really good and it was a great transition from the 2D *Mario*. It kept the spirit but actually introduced a whole load of new gameplay elements.

RG: How important are graphics to games nowadays?

DB: It's important to create games that look good, but that doesn't necessarily mean they have to be photorealistic. The most important thing is to entertain people while enticing them in. If you look at something like Pixar's desk lamp, it draws empathy from the viewer even though it's not human, so you don't have to produce something that looks exactly like real life for it to be engaging. The representation is the most crucial thing. But visuals are as important now as they were back then and I do think we need to develop human behaviours in games – that's essentially animations – mostly subtle and backed up by good artificial intelligence. Players want a certain

level of realism so human characters must have eyes that look away or engage us directly, depending on the circumstance. We need the small visual facial clues like blinks, smirks and so on and we also need in-game conversations to have some sort of mood, to be able to break them off and interrupt people to influence the ongoing dialogue exchange. If you're saying something important and someone walks away, you'd be really annoyed and would probably let them know.

RG: Do you look at contemporary games, then, and think how massive you could make *Elite* if you produced another sequel?

DB: Yes. But I won't be drawn on the obvious next question!

RG: When will *Elite 4* be released?

DB: There it is…

RG: Okay, so when you made *Elite*, did you feel that a raft of 'me too' games would follow?

DB: Yes I did, and I was surprised there wasn't. I mean, there were, but there weren't very many.

RG: And why is that?

DB: Looking at things like *Jet Set Willy* and the number of games that it spawned, there were huge numbers. With *Elite*, I think it may well be that it was the step of going from nothing to something 3D. Programmers had to understand 3D, whereas with *Jet Set Willy* and games like that there were a lot of tools around to help you do it, which I think perhaps was why there were a lot of 'me too' games of that type. *Elite* had that extra expertise and you had to have a bit of mathematical knowledge or it could have become very hard. Very hard indeed…

RG: You worked with Ian Bell on *Elite*. How did you find working in a pair?

DB: It was great. Writing *Elite* was really good. We both worked very, very hard. Thereafter, I think Ian lost motivation. It was much more hard work then, and then, after *Elite*, we went our separate ways.

RG: With the *Elite* sequel, you worked alone. Was it hard?

DB: It was great. It felt good at first. You feel, 'Oh wow, I can do what I like now.' It was only after that that I decided I really needed a team to be able to do a game in a much shorter time because expectations of what's in the game changed dramatically. I think we'd [David and Ian] have carried on working together because Ian was great to work with when we were doing *Elite*, but I think he got other interests and the hunger had gone.

RG: Did your hunger remain?

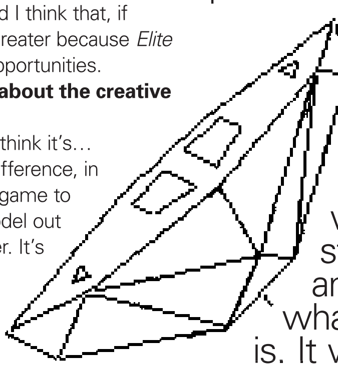
DB: Well, I think that… I mean I wasn't particular driven by the money of it. I was more driven by the excitement. And I think that, if anything, that got greater because *Elite* created so many opportunities.

RG: Was it more about the creative process for you?

DB: Yes, exactly. I think it's… you know, it's no difference, in a sense, building a game to building a fancy model out of Lego or whatever. It's that fun of creation and going, 'Wow, I made that', and it is a real buzz to see something you made in the shops.

RG: You've said in the past that you are concerned that the UK gaming industry is suffering due to tax breaks being offered abroad. Is enough being done to protect games developers in Britain?

DB: I have heard that the UK games industry is bigger than the UK film industry and the UK television industry put together. There is little doubt that the industry will grow further as it matures. The risk is this growth will continue to happen abroad, until we no longer have critical mass in the UK.



> "I wasn't particular driven by the money of it. I was more driven by the excitement"



RG: You also said during your talk at GameCity that you felt the industry had yet to begin. What did you mean by that?

DB: I feel that we haven't yet seen the birth of gaming and that when people look back in years to come they will question when it started. I think they will point to a stage at some point in the future rather than at any point in the past to date. We need to stop being so keen on mirroring the film industry. Instead, we need to step back and analyse what gaming is. It was a while before filmmakers recognised that film was a narrative medium, and I think it's been a while now to recognise that games are not necessarily a narrative medium. When you look at a film like *Star Wars*, which I love to watch, you realise that the actual narrative is rather simplistic and actually quite dull. But you are immersed into a world very different to our own, and that is what gaming is about. You don't necessarily have to have a story because the player forms their own by exploring their own world.

RG: Going back to your games and looking at *Frontier*, if there was any criticism, it was that the space combat was too realistic. Some of our readers feel that it could have had more of an arcade method of ship-to-ship combat.

DB: It was probably a mistake, at least the way it was realised in the end.

RG: So what non-*Elite* game are you most proud of?

DB: That's an interesting one. I suppose *Zarch* because it came out in such a short time; such difficult circumstances, you know. It was a real challenge to get it out. I had three months from having a prototype machine to the game having to ship. That's the fastest I've ever done a game, but I'm quite proud of the result.

RG: And if you had to go back in time, would you change anything about *Elite*?

DB: To be honest, messing with the past is a strange thing. If, for example, we had added some wonderful feature, which meant that *Elite* came out a few months later, then perhaps it would not have done so well, because the following year Acorn was taken over by Olivetti. If it were not so successful then maybe it wouldn't have gone onto other platforms.

It reminds me of the fable of the millionaire businessman who started his career not being able to read and write. When asked, 'Wow, what if you could read and write?', he replied, 'Then I would have got the job as a clerk, and would probably still be a clerk.' Timing and luck is very important in business, and being in the right place and time is key.

RG: If you hadn't co-written *Elite* and started on a career in games development, what do you think you'd be doing today?

DB: I think, given that I was always fascinated with 3D, if I hadn't met Ian, say, or we decided not to work together or whatever, or we fell out a bit earlier, I would like to think that I would have still done a game. I was already planning to write one before I met Ian Bell. I would still have done a 3D game. It would have still been spaceships because I already had spaceships. It may have some of the factors of *Elite*. I would guess it wouldn't have been as good because often, you know, two people looking at a problem is better than one, so I would imagine that I would have still done games but it would have been different. And if that hadn't have worked out, I think I would have been a research scientist.



» [Amiga] The insectoid Thargoids are one of the *Elite* series' recurring enemies.



» David Braben and Ian Bell at the time they created *Elite*.



» [PC] Chris Sawyer, famous for *Transport Tycoon* and *RollerCoaster Tycoon*, began his career with

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

We were inundated with questions for David Braben, who managed to answer a good selection of them

Why was docking in *Elite* made so blimming hard?
People were 'hard' in those days! More seriously, we didn't set out to make it hard; if anything, we set out to make it easier. The problem is it is something that is fundamentally tricky, aligning a ship in 3D and matching rotation rates, while your elbow is stapled to the table in that you can only move in certain directions.

Which game do you wish you had written yourself?
A tricky one. Some of Miyamoto's games stood out as games to be proud of, especially *Mario 64* and *Zelda: Ocarina Of Time* on the N64, so I would choose those!

Who's your favourite Doctor Who?
Jon Pertwee, I think, although I quite liked Tom Baker in some of the episodes. Perhaps I'm showing my age!

Was *Star Raiders* an influence on *Elite*?
No. It probably should have been, but neither Ian nor I were all that aware of games on 'other platforms', as neither of us had, or could afford, an Atari 800.

Which would you rather be: a manager of a large, successful software house, or a hands-on, backroom coder once again?
No question: running a software house, as the things that are possible with a large company are simply impossible otherwise.

Are there any projects you regretted never finishing?
Sometimes I wonder how things might have turned out. The most obvious one was *First Encounters* – if Gametek hadn't been involved, how it might have turned out.

I remember reading that you placed a little note inside the Electron you used to do the *Elite* conversion. Has it, to your knowledge, ever been found? Any clues to where that machine might have ended up? This could be the start of a treasure hunt…
No, I don't know if it has been found. Electrons were pretty tough machines, so there was not a lot of cause to look inside them. Perhaps someone bought one second-hand from Acorn?



Was there an Atari 800 version commissioned?
No, though we did want to do one. But I think by 1984 it was low on the list, sadly. We had our work cut out doing versions of *Elite*, both Ian and I, and a number of very diligent contractors working with our ugly code on 17 different platforms!

Do you think that you will ever work with Ian again or is there too much animosity?
To be honest, I think it is unlikely.

With the success of the current Nintendo formats, any plans to convert the *Elite* series to them, or to do a Virtual Console release?
We consider a lot of things… Of course, we have been involved with development on the Wii, with *LostWinds* being a major success. We just wrote this game for ourselves, and that's one of the reasons why we enjoyed the process so much. It was produced by 12 people over four months, so it harks back to the early days of games development.

Computer games come and go, but what are your feelings knowing that you released a truly timeless classic?
Proud!



QUACKSHOT STARRING DONALD DUCK

DONALD, OR JUST NATHAN DRAKE IN A DUCK COSTUME?



- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MEGA DRIVE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID



HISTORY

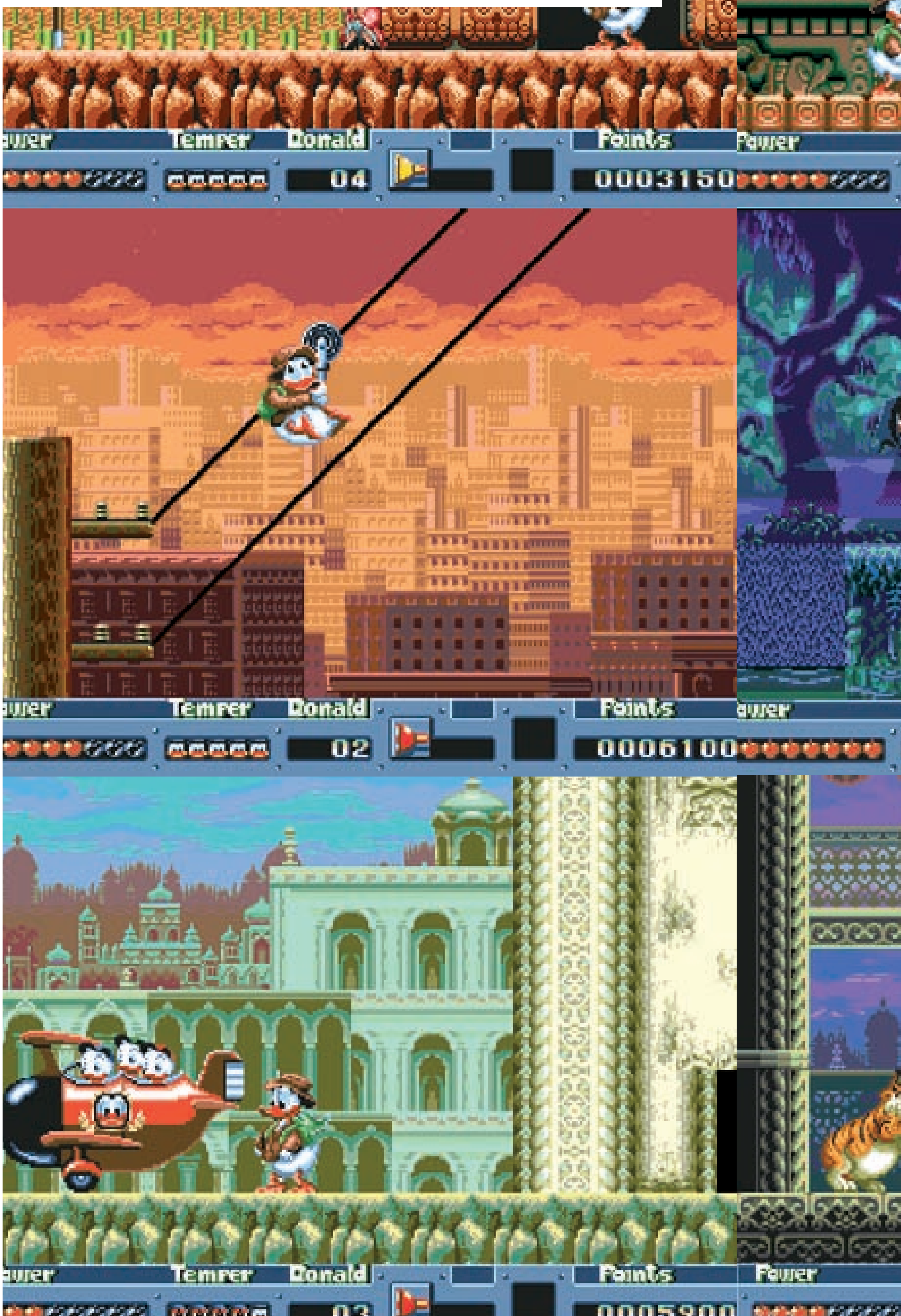
You have to feel for Donald Duck. Not only does he play second fiddle to a big-eared mouse with a girl's voice, but Disney didn't even give him a pair of underpants. Shameless. Well, thanks to Sega of Japan – for brokering a deal with Disney to develop a series of Mega Drive games starring its creations – Donald finally got his moment to shine when he was plucked to star in his own platform game; one that, in my opinion, was actually better than *Castle Of Illusion*.

After discovering a treasure map charting the whereabouts of the lost riches of King Garuzia, Donald and his nephews set off on an *Indiana Jones*-style adventure to find the treasure, make their fortunes and invest it all into a giant mouse trap. Donald's expedition takes him to the arid deserts of Mexico, the darkest reaches of Transylvania, and almost everywhere in between, and every level is wonderfully detailed, brimming with colour and a joy to negotiate.

One of the elements that makes *Quackshot* so endearing is its gameplay, a clever fusion of judicious platform action and soft adventuring. Summoning a handy airlift from his young nephews, Donald is able to travel to any level on the game map (when they're all opened up). However, certain areas of each level can only be accessed if Donald possesses a particular item, ranging from a key or a handy weapon upgrade (such as plungers that stick to walls and can take a duck's weight).

Donald is blessed with an impressive array of moves and weapons, including a brick-destroying bubble-gun and a handy sliding dash move to get him out of tight scrapes and through tight gaps. Also, in a neat homage to the character's famous short fuse, the game features a temper bar which can be filled up by collecting chilli peppers, to turn Donald into a devastating ball of fury.

While it might be short, *Quackshot* holds plenty of charm, wit and enjoyable platform action. And it's also one of the few times in history that Donald actually succeeded in getting one up on his rival Mickey Mouse.



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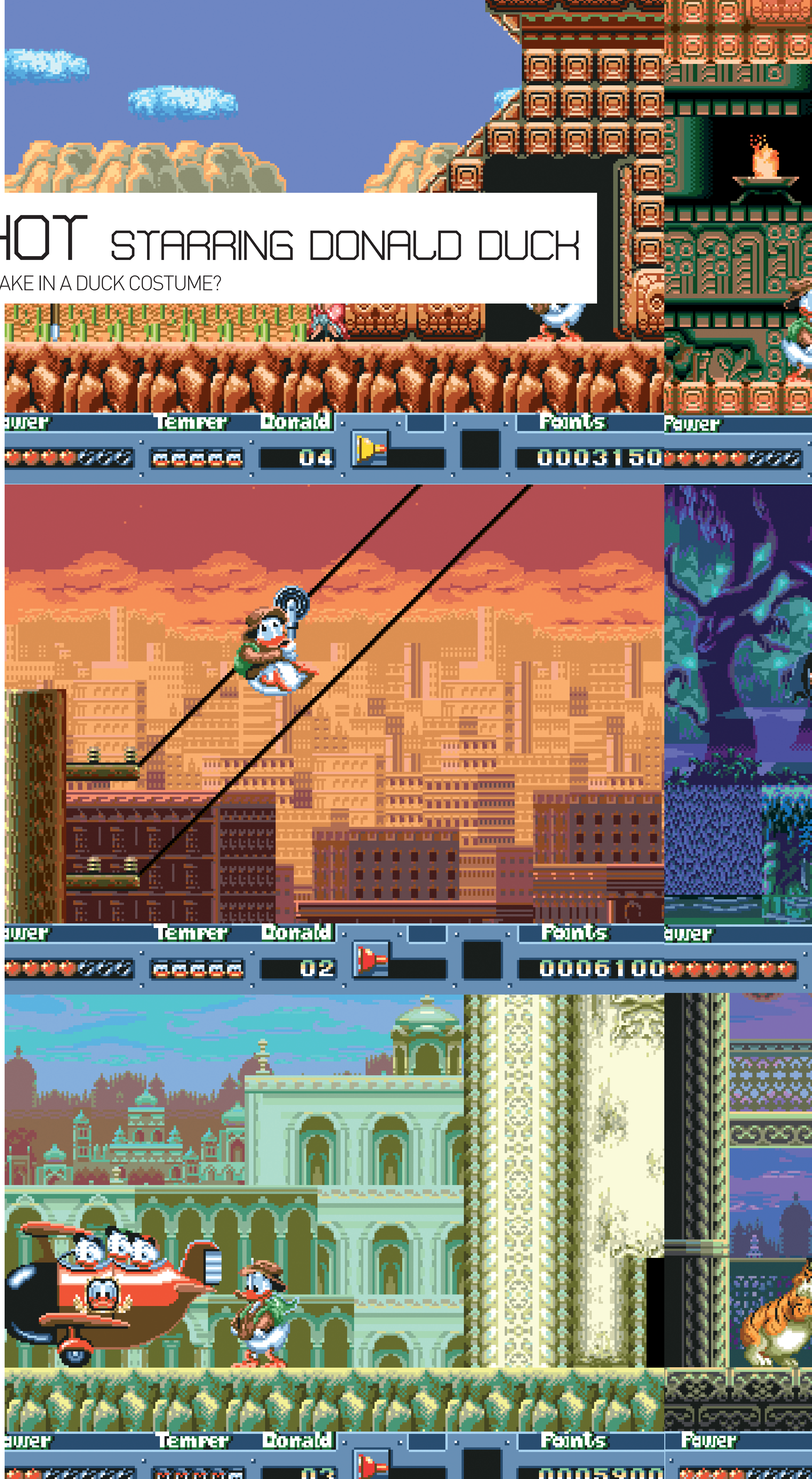
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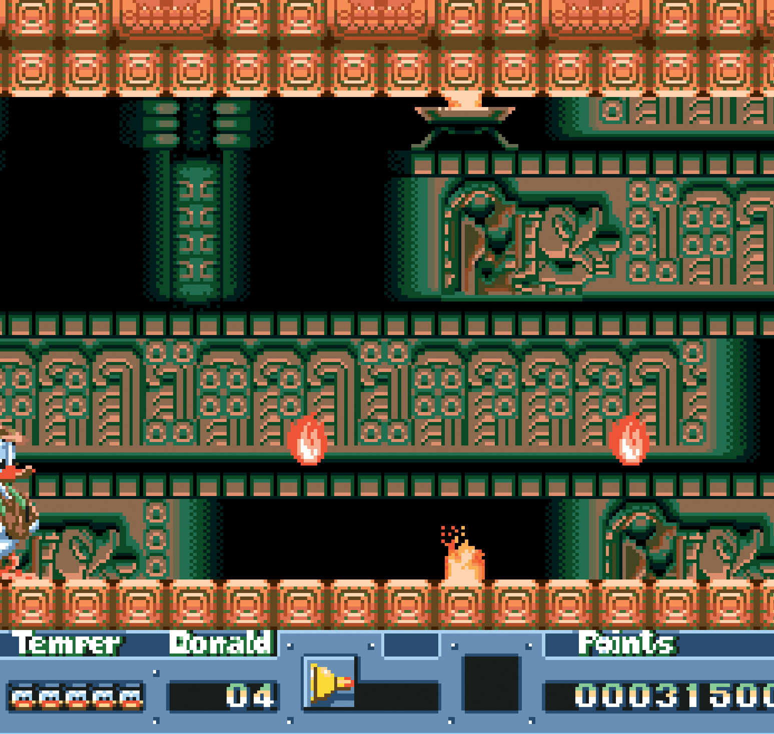
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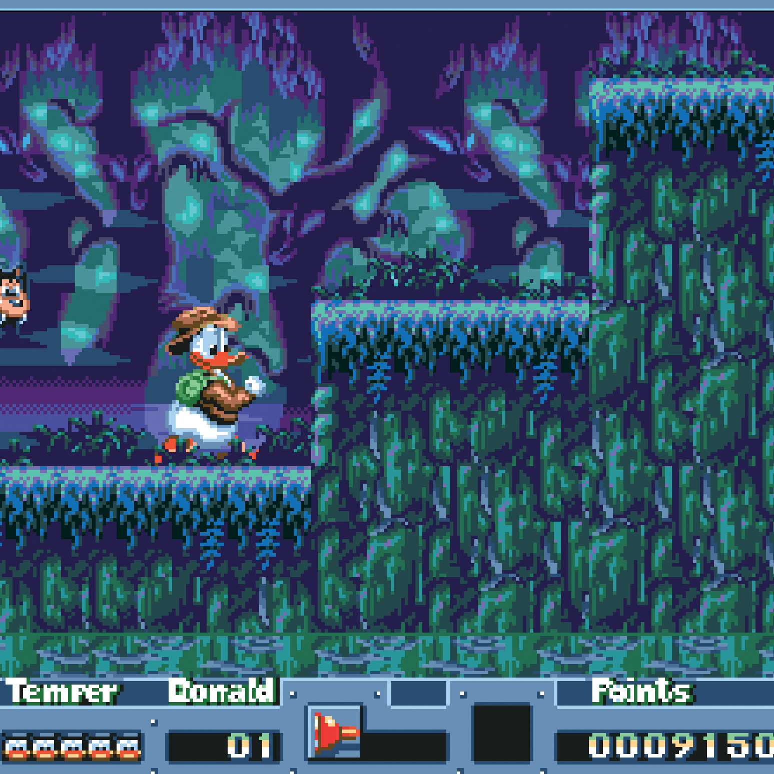
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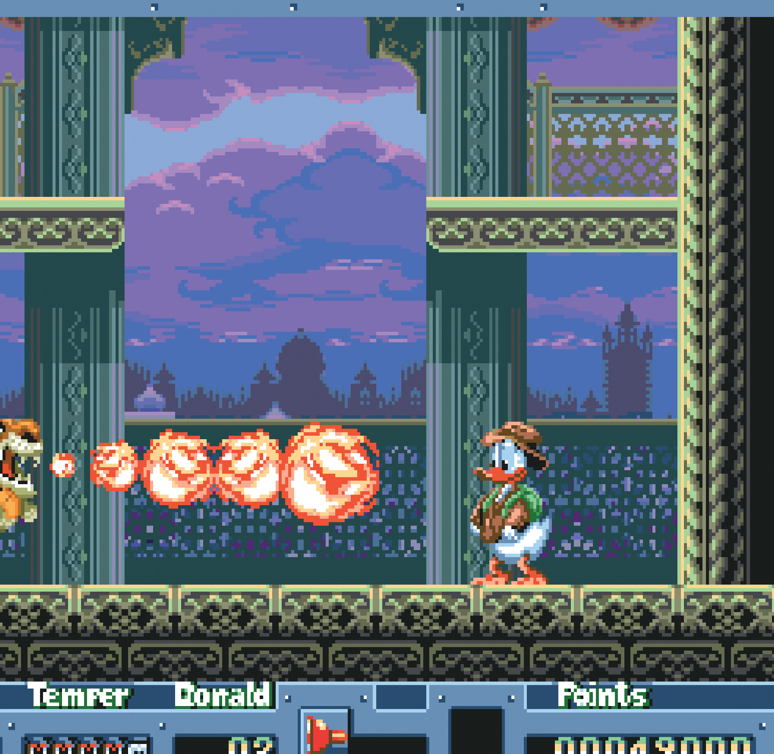



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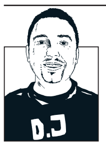

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Castlevania Rebirth

KONAMI GOES RIGHT BACK TO BASICS

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** WIIWARE » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** NA » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI » **DEVELOPER:** M2 » **PLAYERS:** 1



Your enjoyment of Konami's latest *Castlevania* game will depend on the *Castlevania* you enjoy. If you're a big fan of Metroidvania romps then *Rebirth* will leave you cold. If, however, your fondness for the series hearkens back to a time when you couldn't whip above or below you, jump onto stairs or explore a single huge level then *Rebirth* will repay you in spades.

Ostensibly old-school in its design, *Rebirth* actually shares very little with *Castlevania: The Adventure*, the Game Boy title upon which it is based. Instead it feels more like a bizarre cross between the original NES game and *Super Castlevania IV* on the SNES, which in our minds is not necessarily a bad thing.

Visually, it's perfectly adequate, with the usual selection of new and old sprites that have been ripped from a variety of previous *Castlevania* games. Meanwhile the audio is simply fantastic, effortlessly remixing past superb tunes and giving them new life.

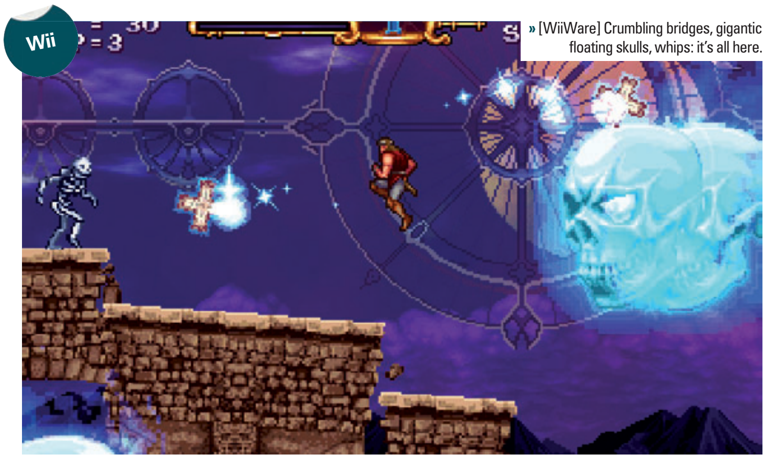
While the linear gameplay is likely to disappoint those who have grown up on the various GBA and DS games, *Rebirth* still manages to be an enjoyable, if fairly predictable, romp through classic *Castlevania* stages of old. It's also amazingly tough like the earlier games, and even with liberal resave points to fall back on, it's going to take a fair time to finish.

Rebirth is by no means perfect, feeling like an unwieldy hodgepodge of past titles, but there's more than enough love here to keep the fans happy.

» Scores

Presentation	60%
Graphics	75%
Sound	93%
Playability	85%
Addictivity	78%
Overall	**82%**

Wii



» [WiiWare] Crumbling bridges, gigantic floating skulls, whips: it's all here.



OPINION



Konami and M2 deliver another polished effort. While it certainly has issues and feels like a backwards step for the franchise, it's perfectly priced, features some truly outstanding audio and instantly recaptures the spirit of the early NES games. Fangs a lot, M2.

Stuart Hunt

iPhone



Paperboy

» **SYSTEM:** IPHONE/IPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **Elite returns with** a surprisingly good port of the classic Eighties coin-op. While it lacks the original arcade visuals – the included Classic mode isn't as authentic as we'd have liked – this remains a decent conversion with solid controls, a rather nifty new 3D mode and additional gameplay options. The loading times are a little irksome, but you can't moan with such a low price tag.

» Score **71%**

XBLA



Vandal Hearts: Flames Of Judgment

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 1200 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **After a lengthy** delay, *Vandal Hearts* appears on Xbox Live, though lacking the visual charm of the original PlayStation creations. Fortunately gameplay, while generic, is perfectly competent, and while this latest SRPG can't compete with *Disgaea* or even the original *Vandal Hearts*, it remains a pleasant time-waster.

» Score **74%**

iPhone



Lemmings Online

» **SYSTEM:** IPHONE/IPHONE TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £0.59 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **Those with fond** memories of DMA's lovable rodents should steer well clear of this App as it will only end in tears. This is a truly abominable port of the classic Amiga game that is utterly destroyed thanks to some of the worst controls we've ever seen in an iPhone game. As a result, *Lemmings* becomes a completely unplayable mess. Quite how this has been approved for release we'll never know.

» Score **8%**

PSP



retro GAMER SIZZLER

Vagrant Story

» **SYSTEM:** PSN/PSP
» **PRICE:** £4.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **Now here's a** time-sinker! *Vagrant Story* was a superb PlayStation RPG from Square that just didn't set the world alight like it should have. Rectify that now by downloading this classic gem and immersing yourself in one of the most innovative and challenging RPGs to ever appear on Sony's console. Considering what a boxed copy goes for, this download is an absolute steal.

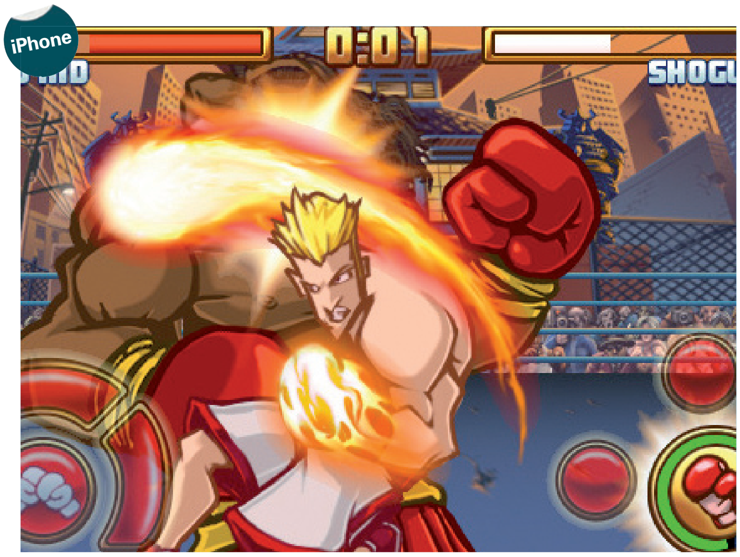
» Score **92%**

Super KO Boxing 2

CAN GLU MOBILE OUT-PUNCH PUNCH-OUT!!?

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** IPHONE/IPOD TOUCH » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PUBLISHER:** GLU MOBILE » **DEVELOPER:** GLU MOBILE » **PLAYERS:** 1

iPhone



» [iPhone] It's a colourful, vibrant take on the typical *Punch-Out!!* formula.

Here's a novel use of the touch-screen - a cartoon boxing game in the vein of *Punch-Out!!*

Playing the role of a blond, pointy pugilist named K.O. Kid, your rise to boxing greatness requires you to defeat 12 fighters - ranging from a fat police officer with a handgun to a man with a baby for a face - over three increasingly difficult boxing circuits. As well as the main Circuit mode, there's a Challenge mode that requires you to win fights within very specific criteria.

But the real meat of any boxing game comes from the fighting and here victory rests on observation rather than button mashing, with attacks performed using a basic list of punches and evasive manoeuvres: left and right body blows and uppercuts, a block, a left or right dodge – which can be used with a punch to offer a quick right and left jab – and a flaming uppercut, accessed by filling up a power bar.



While the controls, visuals and gameplay are all solid enough, we did have an issue with the game's difficulty, which allows you to effortlessly breeze through the first few fights before ramping up the difficulty to frustrating levels. Additionally, once you've finally cracked the knack to flooring any particular opponent, they pose very little challenge in rematches.

Super KO Boxing doesn't quite pack quite the same punch as Nintendo's seminal boxing series, but retains its accessible spirit and vintage gameplay.

OPINION

I've been really enjoying this and not finding it at all hard. The visuals and animation are fantastic, while the controls work extremely well. The only thing that really lets this slick brawler down is the lack of any multiplayer mode. Fun, fast and furious.

Darran Jones

» Scores

Presentation	74%
Graphics	82%
Sound	65%
Playability	79%
Addictivity	69%

Overall 70%

Wii



» [Wii] Many of the bosses have a distinctly insectoid theme that put many long-term fans off.

Resident Evil Zero

HERE WII GO AGAIN...

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** Wii » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £19.99 » **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1

It's amazing what eight years can do to a game. When *Resident Evil Zero* first came along we thoroughly enjoyed it thanks to its insectoid theme, some decent insights into the long-running franchise and the interesting (though thoroughly underused) team play mechanic. In the face of the excellent *Resident Evil 4* however, this lazy GameCube port feels pretty damned tired.

Yes, it still manages to look rather gorgeous – thanks to its fantastic pre-rendered visuals, which obviously uses the same excellent engine as Capcom's excellent GameCube remake of the original game – and yes, it's gameplay holds up pretty well but too much has happened since.

The controls feel horribly archaic and it's all to easy to get stuck on objects or careen into a zombie you were trying to avoid, while the clumsy inventory system will have you screaming with



frustration. Considering the scant updates that this offers over the original GameCube game, there seems very little reason to upgrade.

If you've never experienced *Resident Evil Zero* before, than this is by far the best way to do so, and the adventure itself remains an entertaining enough jaunt. But on a serious note, enough with the updates please, Capcom. You've already re-made the best game in the series for the Wii with *Resident Evil 4: Wii Edition*, so why not stop while you're still ahead?

OPINION

I really don't see the point in this update. *Resident Evil 4* on the Wii was a brilliant way of updating a classic game for a new generation of gamers, but this rushed port doesn't do the title any justice whatsoever. Save yourself some cash and just get the GameCube original instead.

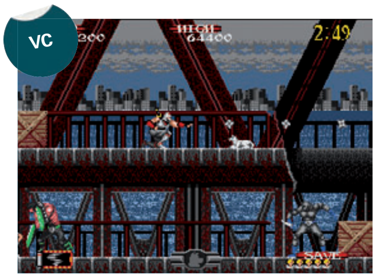
Stuart Hunt

» Scores

Presentation	50%
Graphics	85%
Sound	70%
Playability	65%
Addictivity	68%

Overall 66%

VC



Shadow Dancer

» **SYSTEM:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

» **It's been very slim** pickings for Virtual Console owners recently, but at least we now have this exceptional Mega Drive arcade port to play and appreciate all over again. In fact, we'd say that it's superior to the arcade original thanks to better level layouts, a frantic and improved mini-game, and a far more challenging difficulty level. Even non-fans of *Shinobi* will enjoy this excellent platformer.

» Score **87%**

Wii



Fast Draw Showdown

» **SYSTEM:** WIIWARE
» **PRICE:** 500 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

» **The good news** is that 500 Points is a good price for a faithfully recreated arcade LaserDisc game. The bad news is that, even at an attractive price, *Fast Draw Showdown* isn't worth your money. Featuring the same clunky shooting mechanics as other FMV lightgun games, it's a dull experience that grows boring very quickly.

» Score **48%**

XBLA



Madden NFL Arcade

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 1,200 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

» **Greatly cut down** compared to the retail release, this is nevertheless a fun take on American football. There are nowhere near as many options as you'd traditionally get and the AI feels a little lopsided, but at least its fun multiplayer shines. It's a little too pricey for what you're getting, but those wanting *NFL Blitz* gameplay will be well catered for.

» Score **67%**

XBLA



Matt Hazard: Blood Bath And Beyond

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 1,200 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

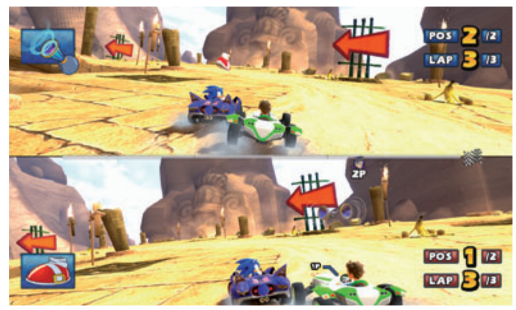
» **Forget the risible** third-person shooter, as this is actually a really entertaining blaster that isn't afraid to take the piss out of itself and is challenging to boot. Set in different time periods and featuring plenty of weapons, *Blood Bath And Beyond* happens to be great fun, especially when you team up with another player.

» Score **70%**

» SONIC & SEGA ALL-STARS RACING

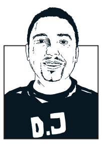


» [Xbox 360] Banjo is a nice addition and works well. But then, he's been karting a few times before.



SUMO DIGITAL TAKES ON MARIO KART

Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing



If Sega's new game proves one thing, it's that no one delivers fan service like Sumo Digital. Want to watch *Shenmue*'s Ryo speed around Casino World on his motorbike? You got it. Fancy listening to *Can You Feel The Sunshine?* while you race around *Jet Set Radio*'s Tokyo-to? No problem. Have an urge to play as Opa-Opa, the Bonanza Bros or *Crazy Taxi*'s BD Joe? You can do that too. In fact, odds are no Sega fan is going to be disappointed by the huge nostalgia fix that Sumo's latest racer offers.

Fan service, no matter how amazing, only gets you so far, however, so it's a relief to reveal that Sonic's new karting game is great fun to play. Of course, this excitement is boosted by the resurrection of characters such as Alex Kidd and Ulala, but at its core, *Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing* is a surprisingly robust racer.

As with all games in the genre, there's a fair amount of rubber-banding AI, but it's nowhere near as pronounced as other examples. Sumo has also wisely vetoed items like *Mario Kart*'s blue shell, meaning that while games remain close, they never rely on simple luck. It's certainly difficult – we wouldn't advise tackling the Advance courses straight away – but by unlocking new characters and mastering the drift you'll soon start making progress. Indeed, the drifting is implemented superbly; hold down the brake, wait a few seconds, then let go for a handy boost. It's a simple system that features a surprising amount of depth, and its mastery is instrumental in finishing in a high position on later stages. One thing that is a concern, however, is that the multiplayer isn't as stable as we'd like, becoming quite sluggish and ruining what would otherwise be a key selling point.

Aesthetically, it's typically Sega, with bright gaudy visuals, clear blue skies and amazingly jaunty music. There are frame rate issues, most noticeably when taking corners and during multiplayer, but nothing that breaks the game to any degree. Being a Sumo game, it's also full of excellent unlockables, ranging from a great selection of classic Sega characters – as well as Rare's Banjo and Kazooie – to some enjoyable challenge and time trial modes. In short, it's a hell of a lot of fun and Sega fans will love it to bits.

In a nutshell

It has issues and certainly boasts a steep difficulty curve, but Sumo's new racer is crafted with so much love and childish energy that it's difficult to not fall for its charms.

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX 360
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PS3, WII, DS
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £49.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **DEVELOPER:** SUMO DIGITAL
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

BRIEF HISTORY

» Sonic is no stranger to appearing in spin-off games. As well as taking on the role of a ball in *Sonic Spinball*, he's cropped up in beat-'em-ups, played a round of tennis, appeared in his own RPG, and even been go-karting before. That's one versatile hedgehog.

OPINION



All-Stars Racing isn't without issues – it relies too much on drifting, the multiplayer is disappointing, and the difficulty curve is steep – but seeing all those Sega characters in one game was enough to make me look past its flaws, and I came away having quite a bit of fun with it.

Stuart Hunt

✱ GO DEEPER

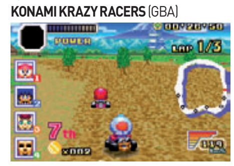
The facts behind Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing

» **Unlockable characters include *Fantasy Zone*'s Opa-Opa, original Sega mascot Alex Kidd, and the awesome Bonanza Bros.**

» **Sonic has been behind the wheel in *Sonic Drift*, an awful Game Gear kart racer from 1994.**

✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
KONAMI KRAZY RACERS (GBA)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
MARIO KART WII (WII)



» Scores

Presentation	93%
Graphics	84%
Sound	92%
Playability	88%
Addictivity	86%

Overall 87%

HOMEBREW

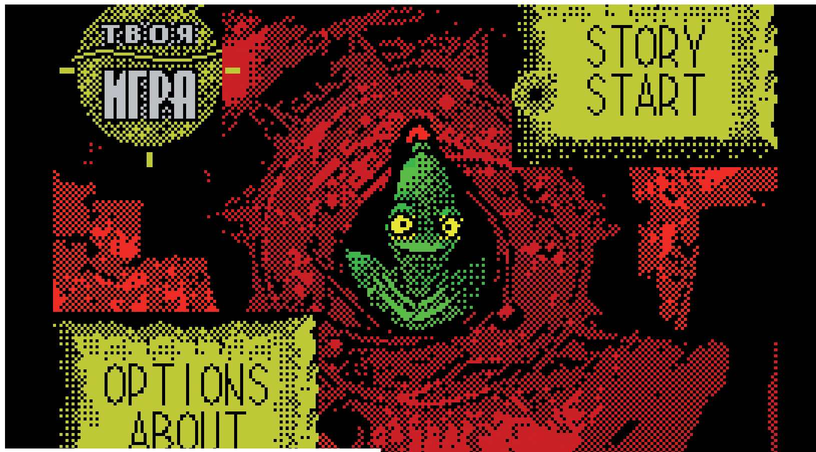
» The scene's latest news and reviews



2010 – something wonderful is going to happen… hopefully. With the release of Game Maker 8, just about any gamer who can work a Windows-based PC can create 2D games, so hopefully we've got a large number of decent titles to look forward to coming up in the near future. Who knows, some of those games might be created by readers of Retro Gamer!



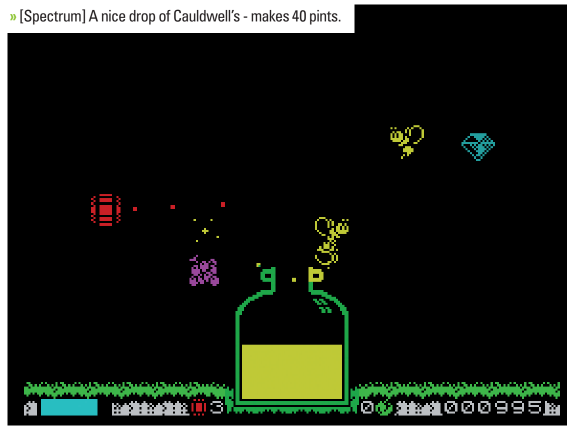
» [Spectrum] *GameX*, well received and rightly so.



» [Spectrum] *Abe's Escape*, Russian Spectrum love at it's best.







» [Spectrum] A nice drop of Cauldwell's - makes 40 pints.

THIS WON'T FIT INTO THE TAPE DECK!

SPECTRUM GAMES BIBLE 1994-200X



FORMAT: SINCLAIR SPECTRUM
DEVELOPED BY: PAUL JOHNS, MICHAEL FRASER AND CONTRIBUTORS
LINK: HTTP://WWW.SPECTRUMGAMESBIBLE.CO.UK.
RELEASE DATE: 2009
PRICE: £9.95 (PAPERBACK)
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

It's not often that the homebrew section receives a book to review - in fact, this would be the first time it's happened! Although the *Spectrum Games Bible* series have previously been mentioned elsewhere in Retro Gamer, this latest edition specifically covers releases from around 1994 onwards, the point when the Spectrum all but ceased to be a viable platform for mainstream publishers, and where the homebrew developers stepped in to fill some of the resultant void. In other words, this is *Spectrum Games Bible - The Homebrew Years*!

There are over two hundred generously-proportioned reviews included, each of which is accompanied by at least one screenshot and, although not every game released during the fifteen year period the book spans has been covered, a good selection of titles appear from names that regular readers of our reviews will probably recognise such as Bob Smith, the Mojon Twins, Jonathan Cauldwell or Computer Emuzone, as well as releases from less prolific developers, assorted *Manic Miner* or *Jet Set Willy* hacks and the occasional unearthed gem like Clive Brooker's *One Man and his Droid 2*, which was completed a few years after the original came out but remained unreleased until 2001.

The *Spectrum Games Bibles* are described as being written "by the fans for the fans", and this has resulted in quite a varied selection of writing styles spread out among this book's 277 pages; as a result, it is just occasionally a little disjointed, but sneakily avoids the possibility of the style becoming overly repetitive. The reviewers aren't afraid to write what they're thinking, there are no rose-tinted spectacles being worn – even for titles over a decade old – and the range of games covered hasn't been restricted to just the good either, so the bad and occasionally downright ugly are discussed at length as well; should a title not be up to scratch, there'll generally be an explanation as to why (a favourite example of ours is the opening line to a review of *Death Game* which reads "I'm sure there's a game in here somewhere?").

At the moment, although there are a few websites to be found that offer reviews of homebrew games for the Spectrum – and we regularly touch upon some of that coverage as well – there is literally nothing this exhaustive out there; yes, the databases available at sites such as World of Spectrum have all of these games listed, but there's no useful feedback accompanying the list describing how they actually play. And, as the book's website points out, being a website, you can't take World of Spectrum into the loo with you for something to read! Obviously, a format-specific book like this isn't going to be for everybody, but anyone who enjoys the odd drop of Spectrum homebrew – or even just wants to see how much a clever programmer can really pull out of the humble Speccy, nearly two decades after its apparent demise – really should be planning a purchase. And with the amusing cover photograph and very professional binding, it'll certainly look rather splendid sat on anybody's coffee table next to the latest issue of Retro Gamer.

BRITISH BOB

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** MSX » **DEVELOPER:** RELEVO VIDEOGAMES
» **DOWNLOAD:** HTTP://MSXDEV.MSXBLUE.COM/ » **PRICE:** FREE

What-ho, old bean - it's nearly teatime in jolly old England and all the ruddy biscuits have been stolen! So British Bob jams his bowler hat on at a jaunty angle, grabs his trusty umbrella and, charged with reclaiming them by the Queen herself, heads out into a rainy, platform-filled London town.

Yes, the faux British-ness is a terrible stereotype, but it's so easy to forgive when the game in question is just so bally spiffing. The graphics and sound in *British Bob* may be along the lines of other MSX platformers, but the feel is also similar to the precision jumping of seminal British games like *Manic Miner* or *Monty On The Run*, though it won't force the player to restart a stage whenever you lose a life. Meanwhile, Bob's brolly even serves as a parachute when in the air, making it possible to drift gently onto otherwise difficult to reach platforms. All in all, a jolly good show.

89%



» [MSX] Where's a beefeater when you need one?





» [Amstrad CPC] This is going to end badly...

RICK DANGEROUS

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** AMSTRAD CPC PLUS » **DEVELOPER:** FANO, BDCIRON AND MACDEATH » **DOWNLOAD:** TINYURL.COM/Y9W5QWO » **PRICE:** FREE

Professional adventurer Richard 'Rick' Dangerous turned twenty during 2009 (he looks older) and, as something of a celebration, a newly-produced CPC Plus-enhanced version of his game was released. This extended mix features improved graphics that utilise the CPC Plus palette, conversions of music from the Atari ST, the 'whaaa!' sample that plays when someone in the game dies, those cute animated cut-scenes and, because there was more memory to play with, the developers have thrown in the extra screens previously missing on the CPC - all at no extra charge!

Of course, it's still good old *Rick Dangerous* under the hood, retaining all the 'joys' of unexpected spear traps up the Khyber Pass, leaps of faith that tend to end in spike pits and all the trial-and-error (with heavy emphasis on the latter) entertainment of the original. Still, it's a fitting birthday present to the series and, for any fans (or masochists), it'll be a neat addition to their game collection.

85%

PRINGLES

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** SEGA MEGADRIVE » **DEVELOPER:** FUTURE DRIVER
» **DOWNLOAD:** TINYURL.COM/Y98Y7KJ » **PRICE:** FREE

Mr Pringles is hungry and only a certain brand of potato-based snack will do – so the player must guide his bouncing, moustachioed head around the levels, munching away at hovering, wafer-thin potato snacks. Chomping a crisp launches him further into the air and, if skilfully controlled, it'll give access to more morsels (with a combo bonus if they're scarfed down quickly enough).

This is probably the slickest Mega Drive homebrew we've ever seen; it could almost pass as a commercial release visually, everything moves smoothly, and the control system, although not immediately intuitive because of the bouncing motion, doesn't take too long to acclimatise to. It's a shame the sound is merely a couple of sampled effects because an upbeat piece of music would have gone down like a sour cream and onion treat. With only three stages, the challenge lies in mastering the combo scoring, which should take some time.

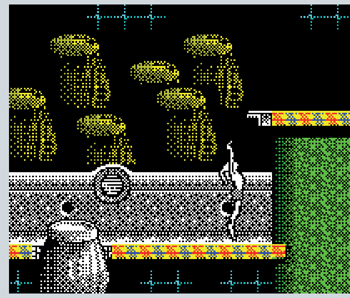
81%




» [Mega Drive] Is anyone else hungry...?

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community


» [Spectrum] A Russian conversion of Abe.

» Those Spectrums

The Christmas period was extremely busy for the Spectrum, so it's all but taken over the news! First off, there was the announcement of Your Game, a Russian Spectrum game competition that happens every two or three years on average. *Nipik 2* (scored 82% back in load 58) and *Abe's Mission: Escape* (based on *Abe's Odyssey* no less) were previous entrants and more information (translated by Google) is here: http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=ru&sl=ru&tl=en&u=http%3A%2F%2Fabzac.retropc.ru%2Fti.


» [Spectrum] Must… resist… innuendo!

» They Get

The second Spec-story of note is the flood of releases over the festive period – which came too late to mention for the event itself – including three platformers. Two are from those ever-present Mojon Twins (www.mojontwins.com) and are called *Uwol, Quest For Money* and *Sgt. Helmet Zero*. The third is by WOS regular DM Boozefreak and is called *Miles Mad Mission* (download from http://www.sendspace.com/file/9ufyb8). Apparently, he's been working on it for eighteen months!

» Everywhere!

And the Spectrum inrush continued with a spot of top-down driving called *Battery's Not Precluded* from the almost ubiquitous Jonathan Cauldwell (as always, website at http://members.fortunecity.com/jonathan6/egghead/), who also offered up a little unexpected surprise for *Jet Set Willy* fans; he dismantled the original game and, with a little magic and paring down, crammed the majority of it into 16K! That one is available from ZXDemo.org over at http://www.zxdemo.org/extra/jsw16k.zip.

HOMEBREW

» The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

» The Reaper Awaits You

We haven't covered it previously (and this might well be just the excuse to give it a review in the near future), but *Blazing Wings* is a splendid remake of Thalion's well-received Atari ST/Amiga flying reptile-themed blaster *Wings of Death*. Newly-released version 1.1.1 fixes some issues and inaccuracies with previous versions – would-be dragons and existing players alike should flap their way over to http://www.amigachapterone.com/blazing_wings/.



» [PC] Starting out small.

» It's In The Game

Mark Overmars' Game Maker is now into its tenth year of helping non-programming game designers to produce all manner of games, and the Christmas period saw the release of version 8, with appropriate fanfare. As with previous versions, GM8 can be registered to unlock extra features but comes in a free-to-use 'lite' version that is very capable of making any variety of 2D game. Publishers Yoyo Games have a dedicated page for it at http://www.yoyogames.com/gamemaker/ as well as showcasing games uploaded by users (click the "browse" button on that page).

FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at ***Blasting Agent.***

WE'VE GOT SOME no-nonsense run-and-gun action this month, as *Blasting Agent*'s blond, presumably muscular and quite literally square-jawed hero attempts to leap and shoot his way through a series of large, platform-filled scrolling areas and boss fights, collecting trinkets and dealing out some pixelated punishment. http://www.kongregate.com/games/SeiferTim/blasting-agent.

REMAKES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING...



FINGERS MALONE



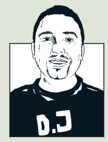
» DOWNLOAD: TINYURL.COM/Y8Z5N55

Fingers Malone is a burglar, sporting both a striped jumper and eye mask when working and presumably carrying a bag labelled 'swag'. His goal is to clean out the safe on each level, but he'll first need to collect the keys before opening its door and the exit will remain resolutely locked unless all of the floor switches are activated.

On its default difficulty setting, this game is brutally fast-paced to an almost absurd degree. However, as long as Easy mode is selected, this is quirky but surprisingly charming platform-based action, retaining the unusual visual styling of the C16 original, even down to the burgling anti-hero himself being rather bizarrely represented as a mobile suitcase with a happy face on it.



THE FIFTEENTH FLOOR



» DOWNLOAD: HTTP://DSGAMEMAKER.COM/GAMES.PHP

A man haunted by tragedy in his recent past takes to the road and finds himself at a small hotel in the middle of nowhere – but how has he already checked in before arriving, why is the bell hop so distant and what on Earth is hiding away on the Fifteenth Floor?

It's an intriguing premise alright, and as you might expect, the action is point-and-click, using the touchscreen and just three command icons to interact with objects, and the D-pad to navigate around. The game itself is surprisingly short (just two actual chapters and an epilogue, presumably setting up for a sequel) but what's there is a fun twenty-or-so minutes with a couple of nice twists along the way. Hopefully we can look forward to a sequel with a little bit more meat on its bones, though.

Remake of the Month





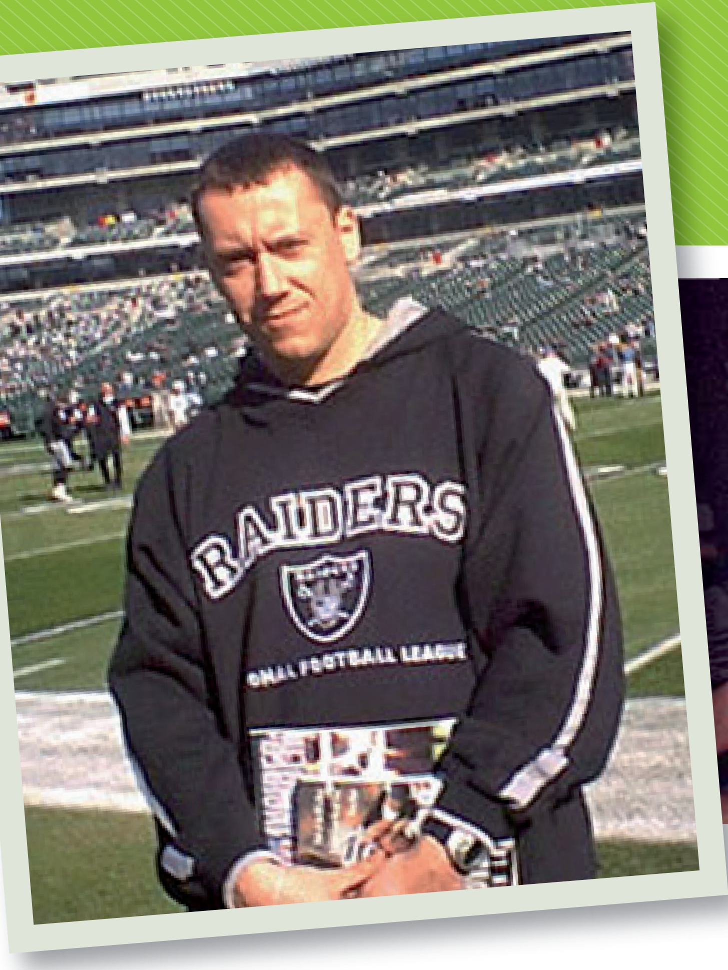
GENETOS



» DOWNLOAD: WWW.TATSUYA-KOYAMA.COM/SOFTWARE/WG002_GENETOS_ENG.HTML

Each stage in Tatsuya Koyama's *Genetos* represents a generation in the history of shoot-'em-up games, with the first being a happy pastiche of *Space Invaders*, the second resembling *Galaga*, and so on, until a huge fifth level inspired by titles like *Ikaruga*. Some dispatched enemies will leave behind green items, while collecting them fills a bar at the foot of the screen; 80 per cent full will wake up the level's boss, while brimming it causes the player's ship to evolve into something suitable for the next generation. Also, power-ups are dished out as the ship matures, based on factors such as playing style.

Genetos wants to tell its story from start to end, so is very generous with extra lives and relatively easy to complete on its Standard User setting, but that's only the second of five difficulty levels; the two hardest will offer a significant challenge. Unlocking Free Play also enables the player to start at any generation or rush the bosses with their chosen ship and unlocked weapons, and taking on the first level with the best ship and the Summon power-up (which drags a previously defeated boss into battle as a player weapon) is incredibly satisfying. And that's true of *Genetos* generally, both for newcomers to shoot-'em-ups andhardcore fans alike.





» **Above:** Appearing in Crash for a *Match Day* challenge.









HOMEBREW HEROES

SINCE WE'RE DOING SOMETHING SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT THIS ISSUE AND LOOKING AT A HOMEBREW BOOK, IT SEEMED A GOOD IDEA TO TALK TO ONE OF THE PEOPLE BEHIND IT; **PAUL JOHNS** (PSJ 3809 ON THE RETRO GAMER FORUMS) IS THAT PERSON, AND THE BOOK ITSELF IS AVAILABLE FROM HTTP://WWW.SPECTRUMGAMESBIBLE.CO.UK/ ALONG WITH THE FIVE PREVIOUS INSTALMENTS IN THE SERIES

Retro Gamer: So how did the Spectrum Games Bible books come about in the first place?
Paul Johns: I was inspired by Andrew Rollings' Spectrum review book he created, and wanted more and more reviews to read! I contacted Michael Fraser (co-author) who had a lot of reviews on his own website, The Rubber Beermat, and asked to use them. Michael agreed and that was the start! A thread on World of Spectrum helped get more interest and everything quickly went from a basic idea to the first book in a matter of months. We've now finished the series of six books, totalling over 1,700 pages and about 1,500 reviews.

RG: And was this latest instalment about homebrew games always part of the plan?
PSJ: Yes, we decided to split the series into six books to cover all the years and all the main games; the final book was aimed at the non-commercial years of the Spectrum from 1994-200x. At first I thought it might be a bit too thin, but it's been amazing how many great games are still being created for the Spectrum by the likes of Jonathan Cauldwell, Bob Smith and CEZ, and the final page count was a healthy 270 pages.

RG: Is this the final chapter or are there plans for another book when there are enough new games to fill it?
PSJ: I'm sure I also speak on Michael's behalf when I say I don't want to see Microsoft Word for quite some time! I think we all need a break! However, I would like to do a compilation book featuring all the best reviews/games from all six books at some point.

RG: Some of the titles included are quite close to the knuckle; was there anything that you or Michael Fraser weren't sure about including?
PSJ: There were quite a few games with some extremely odd titles, which we didn't use - I can't even mention them here! One or two *Manic Miner*-style games had some odd storylines or screens as well, but most Speccy users will be in their late twenties or thirties, so we thought no one should be too shocked.

HIGH FIVE

The homebrew games Paul couldn't live without

1 **Farmer Jack in Harvest Havoc** - Cronosoft/ Bob Smith
A great playable game based on *Mr Do!* but with a twist. I love the graphics and sound.

2 **Rallybug** - Jonathan Cauldwell
A great 'Mario'-style platform game; very addictive and keeps you coming back for more.

3 **GameX** - Cronosoft/ Jonathan Cauldwell
Full of sub-games, it's amazing how Cauldwell squeezed this into 48k.

4 **W*H*B** - Bob Smith
Brilliant isometric puzzle game; very impressive.

5 **Cannon Bubble** - CEZ Games Studio
The Spectrum's answer to *Puzzle Bobble*, with an excellent two-player mode as well.

RG: You obviously have an interest in new games on the Spectrum. Have you developed any yourself?
PSJ: I wish I could code! I did create a game using Platform Game Designer that used the graphics from *Rebelstar*. I even emailed Julian Gollop to see if it was okay and he was fine with it… but this was only a basic platform game.I wish I could create games, but thankfully there are many others doing it and doing a great job.

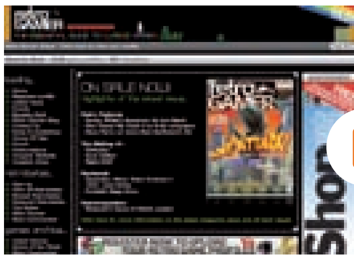
RG: Finally, where do you think the homebrew community's popularity comes from?
PSJ: A huge admiration for the Spectrum. The Speccy reminds people of their youth, rose-tinted memories of the Eighties and many great games. I think today people like to have a 'basic' style game where they can pick up and play and have a quick blast for five or ten minutes, and a lot of Speccy games offer this. Plus you now get Spectrum emulators for mobile phones, game consoles, etc; I know a fair few people who are suddenly into old retro games again, which is a good thing.

BARGAIN HUNT

DESPERATE TO FINISH OFF YOUR RETRO COLLECTION? WANT TO GET YOUR HANDS ON ALL THE BEST BARGAINS BUT DON'T KNOW WHERE TO GO? THEN VISIT **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET/BARGAIN_HUNT.PHP** AND DISCOVER ALL THE CLASSIC MACHINES THAT YOU'LL EVER NEED

You've been asking for it forever, but we're pleased to announce a brand new look for **Retro Gamer**'s Buyer's Guide section that makes it incredibly easy to get your hands on all the best retro bargains.

Using our new search engine couldn't be easier. All you need to do is select a manufacturer and machine from the pull-down menu. Once you've found the system you're after, the magic of the internet will search eBay for the top 20 ending items, meaning that you'll be able to gauge the market's health with very little effort. This month, Darran's been looking for some console bundles.



Head on over to the excellent **www.retrogamer.net** and click on 'Bargain Hunt' or visit **www.retrogamer.net/bargain_hunt.php**



Put in the details for the greatest computer in the world and discuss with your staff writer why it's so much better than the ZX Spectrum.



Swoon in delight as you find yourself getting ever closer to collecting all the £1.99 *Simulator* games that Codemasters ever released.

eBAY BARGAINS

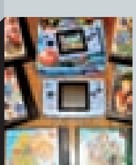
Retro Gamer has been scouring the world's most popular auction site to find the best bargains out there…



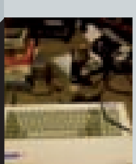
■ It wasn't boxed, and it only came with a single game, but £30 (including postage and packing) for an Intellivision is still pretty good going.



■ Now here's a good deal. As well as a front-loading Mega CD and Mega Drive, £87 netted 22 games, including *Final Fight*, *Sonic 3* and *Cobra Command*.



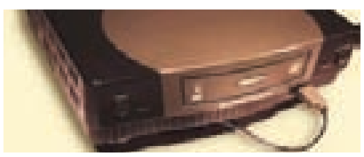
■ Getting Neo Geo Pocket games in their original cases is often difficult, so finding a set of six with a machine for £55 is definitely worth celebrating.



■ If you want a Sam Coupe you'll have to dig deep as they're certainly not cheap. This 256k model went for £175 but did include several decent games.

3DO

3DO GOLDSTAR	**£45+ ($81+)**
PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)	**£40+ ($74+)**
PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)	**£20+ ($37+)**



ACORN

ARCHIMEDES	**£30 ($55)**
ATOM	**£50 ($92)**
ELECTRON	**£10 ($18)**
BBC MICRO	**£15 ($28)**



AMSTRAD

CPC 464	**£10+ ($18+)**
CPC 664	**£90+ ($165+)**
CPC 6128	**£25+ ($46+)**
GX4000	**£50+ ($92+)**

APPLE

APPLE II	**£30+ ($55+)**

ATARI

400/800/600XL/XE	**£20+ ($37+)**
2600 (VCS)	**£20+ ($37+)**
5200	**£30 ($55)**
7800	**£20+ ($37+)**
JAGUAR	**£20+ ($37+)**
JAGUAR CD	**£70 ($129)**
LYNX I/II	**£20+ ($37+)**
ST	**£20+ ($37+)**

BANDAI

GUNDAM RX-78	**£75+ ($138+)**
PLAYDIA	**£90 ($166)**
PIPPIN (ATMARK)	**£500+ ($921+)**
WONDERSWAN	**£10 ($18)**
WONDERSWAN COLOR	**£20 ($37)**
WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL	**£25 ($46)**



COMMODORE

AMIGA 500/600/1200	**£20+ ($37+)**
C16/PLUS/4	**£15+ ($28+)**
C64	**£10+ ($18+)**
C64 GS	**£30+ ($55+)**
C128	**£30+ ($55+)**
CDTV	**£20 ($37)**
CD32	**£25 ($46)**
VIC-20	**£10+ ($18+)**



FUJITSU

FUJITSU FM	**£100+ ($184+)**
FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY	**£200+ ($368+)**



MISCELLANEOUS

BALLY ASTROCADE	**£20 ($37)**
BARCODE BATTLER	**£5 ($18)**
CASIO LOOPY	**£25 ($46)**
FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F	**£10 ($18)**
COLECOVISION	**£30 ($55)**
DRAGON 32/64	**£8 ($15)**
ARCADIA 2001	**£10 ($18)**
EPOCH CASSETTE VISION	**£20 ($37)**
EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION	**£30 ($55)**
INTELLIVISION	**£40+ ($74+)**
ODYSSEY	**£10 ($18)**
ORIC-1	**£20 ($37)**
PLAYSTATION	**£10 ($18)**
SAM COUPÉ	**£50-£200 ($92-$368)**
SUPERVISION	**£15 ($28)**
TIGER ELEC GAME.COM	**£15 ($28)**
TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)	**£10 ($18)**
VECTREX (MB/GCE)	**£80 ($147)**
X68000	**£90+ ($166+)**

MSX

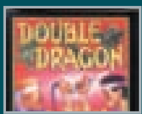
MSX 1	**£10+ ($18+)**
MSX 2	**£20+ ($37+)**
MSX 2+	**£30+ ($55+)**
MSX TURBO R	**£30+ ($55+)**

NEC

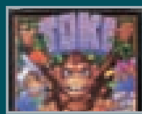
PC-6601	**£10+ ($18+)**

RETRO AUCTION WATCH

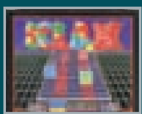
Retro Gamer sifts through the pages of eBay to report back on any items of interest, hardware or software that have caught our eyes. This month, Darran's digging through some Lynx Arcade Conversions



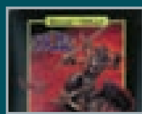
DOUBLE DRAGON
System: **Atari Lynx**
Normally sells for **£30**
Ended at **£43**



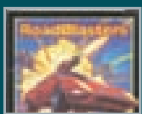
TOKI
System: **Atari Lynx**
Normally sells for **£14**
Ended at **£3.67**



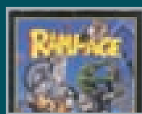
KLAX
System: **Atari Lynx**
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **No Sale**



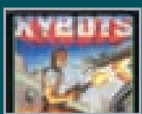
JOUST
System: **Atari Lynx**
Normally sells for **£13**
Ended at **£24.56**



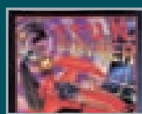
ROAD BLASTERS
System: **Atari Lynx**
Normally sells for **£15**
Ended at **£4.67**



RAMPAGE
System: **Atari Lynx**
Normally sells for **£20**
Ended at **£36.63**



XYBOTS
System: **Atari Lynx**
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£12.89**



S.T.U.N. RUNNER
System: **Atari Lynx**
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£4.27**

PC-8801	**£20 ($37)**
PC-9801	**£35 ($65)**
PC-FX	**£50 ($92)**
PC-ENGINE	**£55 ($101)**
PC-ENGINE GT	**£70+ ($129+)**
TURBOGRAFX-16	**£30 ($55)**
TURBO EXPRESS	**£50 ($92)**
SUPERGRAFX	**£80 ($147)**
PC-E CD-ROM/ TURBOGRAFX CD	**£50+ ($92+)**
PC-E DUO/ TURBO DUO	**£120 ($221)**
DUO-R	**£80 ($147)**

NINTENDO

FAMICOM	**£60 ($111)**
FAMICOM AV	**£40 ($74)**
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM	**£70 ($129)**
SHARP FAMICOM TWIN	**£100 ($184)**
GAME & WATCH	**£1+ ($2+)**
GAME BOY B/W	**£5 ($9)**
GAME BOY POCKET	**£8 ($15)**
GAME BOY COLOR	**£12 ($22)**
GAME BOY ADVANCE	**£25 ($46)**
N64	**£10 ($18)**
N64 DD	**£150+ ($276+)**
NES (TOASTER)	**£15 ($28)**
NES (DOG BONE)	**£50 ($92)**
SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)	**£20 ($37)**
SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JAPAN)	**£50+ ($92+)**
VIRTUAL BOY	**£80 ($147)**



PHILIPS

CD-I	**£20+ ($37+)**
CD-I 450/500	**£30 ($55)**
VIDEOPAC G7000	**£10 ($18)**
VIDEOPAC G7400	**£20 ($37)**

SEGA

32X	**£35 ($65)**
DREAMCAST	**£25 ($46)**
GAME GEAR	**£15 ($28)**
SG-1000	**£50-£150 ($80-$260)**
SC-3000	**£50 ($92)**
MASTER SYSTEM I/II	**£10 ($18)**



AMSTRAD MEGA PC	**£10 ($18)**
TERADRIVE	**£100 ($184)**
MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II	**£25 ($46)**
GENESIS 3	**£35 ($65)**
NOMAD	**£100 ($184)**
MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/X'EYE	**£100+ ($184+)**
MEGA-CD (SCD) I/II	**£50+ ($92+)**
PICO	**£20 ($37)**
SATURN	**£30 ($55)**

SINCLAIR

ZX80	**£200 ($368)**
ZX81	**£70 ($129)**
ZX SPECTRUM 48K	**£10 ($18)**
ZX SPECTRUM 128K	**£40 ($74)**
ZX SPECTRUM+	**£35 ($65)**
ZX SPECTRUM +2	**£35 ($65)**
ZX SPECTRUM +3	**£40 ($74)**

SNK

NEO-GEO AES	**£150+ ($276+)**
NEO-GEO MVS	**£70 ($129)**
NEO-GEO CD	**£100 ($184)**
NEO-GEO CDZ	**£80+ ($147+)**
NEO-GEO POCKET	**£20 ($37)**
NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR	**£35 ($65)**

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

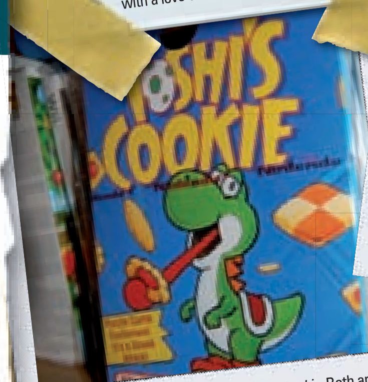
THIS MONTH'S COLLECTOR IS JONATHAN LADD WHO HAS A SPECIAL INTEREST IN SEALED NES GAMES



» "Hi there, my name is Jonathan Ladd and I'm a 25-year old graphic designer from Wiltshire with a love of all things NES."



» "I've been collecting mint NES titles for many years now and have over 120 sealed, complete-in-box titles, including many rare releases like *Mario is Missing*, *Mega Man 2* and *4* and *Probotector*."



» "I actually have two versions of *Yoshi's Cookie*. Both are sealed and one of them has the rarer red tear with it."



» "Due to buying a new house many of my sealed NES titles will be up for sale. If you're after any then please contact me at hankdesign@googlemail.com."



» "I'm a big fan of Nintendo and my next collection will be going after Wii and GameCube titles. As with my NES, I'll be going for sealed games."



If you have a collection that you feel the rest of the **Retro Gamer** readership needs to know about, then contact us at **retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk** and we'll do our best to get you in the magazine.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

STAR LETTER

PARADISE LOST

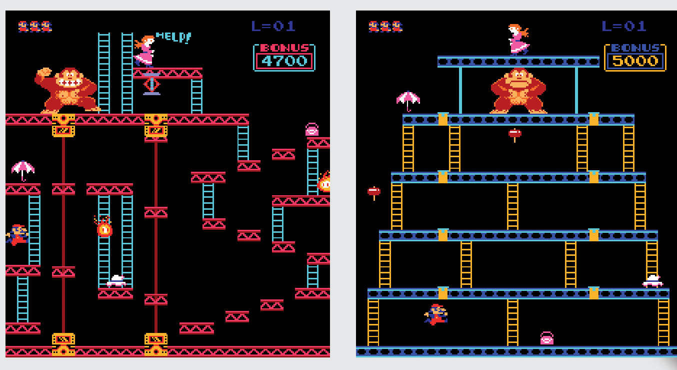
Dear Retro Gamer,

I was playing *Donkey Kong* on MAME the other day when my seven-year old nephew came over and asked me why I was playing such a rubbish-looking game. I patiently explained to him that it was a very important game and helped pave the way to the titles we enjoy today. He was looking unconvinced and began mentioning *Wii Sports Resort* when I took a chance and thrust the joystick in his hands.

The next hour was sheer bliss as he gazed vividly at the screen, jumping over barrels and hitting enemies with the hammer. Thanks to the Virtual Console he now constantly plays the NES version, and has even moved over to *Donkey Kong Jr* and the *Donkey Kong Country* titles. It's an admittedly small victory, but I'm glad that Thomas has so readily taking to playing old games. Now if only I could persuade my wife!

Benjamin James, Huddersfield

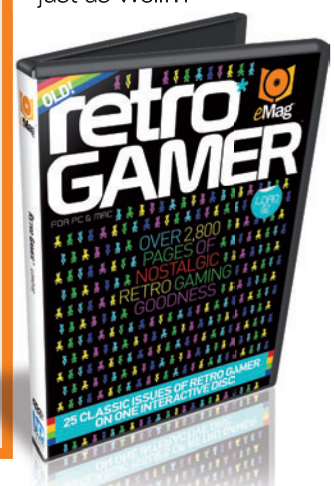
What a touching tale, Benjamin. Darran's been trying a similar thing with his two daughters, but while they enjoy playing games, they stick to the DS and Wii and very little else. Have a new eMag to celebrate bringing classic games to a young gamer.



» [Arcade] *Donkey Kong* is perfect proof that everyone loves great games.

WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our brand new eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…





» Never has a little machine caused so much controversy.

SUPER SIMON

Dear Retro Gamer,

I just wanted to say thank you for the excellent article about *Simon* that appeared in issue 73 of your wonderful magazine. I love all aspects of gaming and have many fond memories of playing this back in the day, so was absolutely delighted to see such an in-depth article appear in the magazine.

I had a rather large collection of handheld games back in the day, *BMX Flyer* being a particular favourite, and it would be fantastic to see an article about these wonderful little machines. Please make it happen.

Brian Dean, via email

SIMPLE SIMON

Dear Retro Gamer,

What was going through your mind when you decided to commission that *Simon* article? Games like *Simon* have absolutely no place in a magazine like **Retro Gamer** and are best left forgotten along with other electronic rubbish from the Eighties like *Major Morgan* and those naff Tomy electronic 3D games that you held up to your eyes for the rubbish 3D effects. If this is the direction that **Retro Gamer** is heading in you'll have lost yourself a reader.

Christopher Brown, via email

We knew that the *Simon* article wouldn't be to everyone's taste, but it's certainly turned into something of a hot potato with readers loving and loathing it in equal measure. Retro Gamer will always be a straight-hitting retro mag, but every now and then it's refreshing to throw the odd curve ball.

HELP NEEDED

Dear Retro Gamer,

I've tried everything else but perhaps you can help me with the problem I have. I am looking for a Mega Drive game called *The Flaming Dodgeball Kid*, but it was only released in Japan and I need the original Japanese title.

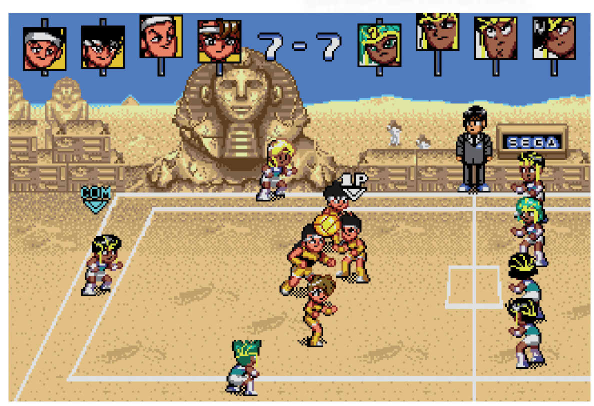
Paul Edwards, Middlesex

Sorry to hear about your problem Paul, but we may be able to help. We've been given some advice from NTSC-uk.com and they suggest you look for *Honou no Toukyuuji – Dodge Danpei*. Hope this is what you were looking for.

BRINGING COUNTRIES TOGETHER

Dear Retro Gamer,

I have been enjoying your magazine for the past four years or so and felt compelled



» Here's hoping the helpful members of NTSC-uk have made Paul's task easier.



CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ

Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Next Month: John Romero



BURNING QUESTION?

IF YOU HAVE a burning question, such as 'Will David Braben ever patch things up with Ian Bell?' or 'does Matthew Smith check in to hotels as Miner Willy?' then you should head straight over to our forum to post your questions to our interviewees. The best of the bunch will be answered and revealed in the next issue. To find out who we'll be interviewing in the coming months, visit the Retro Gamer forum now at www.retrogamer.net/forum

to write you. I have enjoyed your recent bookazines and plan on subscribing this week, thanks for the new US offer. Every time my friends and I gather for some good old retro gaming, I always bring along a few issues of your wonderful magazine and people are consistently amazed that such a publication actually exists.

We often wonder why there seems to be no US equivalent of your magazine, but I've come to the conclusion there really doesn't need to be one. You cover it all and I love reading about games and consoles I missed or have never heard of before. At first, I was put off by articles that focused on British computers or games starring someone named Dizzy, Willy, or Cuthbert, but the greatness of your magazine is the amount of times I can read through it and discover something that I might have skipped over before.

Going back to previous issues, I began to become far more interested in those British systems and games. I also began to realize just what a key role Britain and the UK has played in the history of this hobby I love so much. Thank you for publishing such a great magazine and inviting the rest of the world to join you.

Sincerely,

Will Oliver via email

Glad to hear that you're enjoying the magazine, Will. While we'll obviously be focused on the UK gaming scene – it's where we're based, after all – we are continually looking to other parts of the world, as recent articles will prove. Needless to say expect more great features in the future.

> "Britain and the UK has played a key role in the history of this hobby I love so much"

RETROBATE PROFILE



Name:	Dave Skillen
Joined:	18 September 2009
Location:	Scotland
Occupation:	Online retailer and computer technician
Website:	www.suzukiookie.co.uk
Fave Games System:	PC



[Spectrum] UK developers have given a lot more to the games industry than a few obscure British character names.

AMUSING DIVISION

Dear Retro Gamer,

I was just wondering if there has ever been an article about Sega AM2 (Amusement Division 2/3) in any of your previous magazines. I am interested in the making of arcade games like *Virtua Racing*, *Daytona*, *Sega Rally*, the *Virtua Fighter* series and Nineties arcade games in general, and would love to see move coverage in the magazine. Also, would you ever consider a bookazine entirely dedicated to Eighties and Nineties arcade games?

All the best

Luois, via email

There was an article about Sega's Model 2 arcade boards all the way back in issue 25. Unfortunately, the issue in question has long since sold out, so eBay is your best bet. Alternatively, you can purchase a copy of our first eMag from www.imagineshop.co.uk, as it features the first 30 issues under Imagine Publishing.

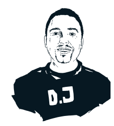
EGO STROKING

Dear Retro Gamer,

I just wanted to send you a quick note to say congratulations on an excellent issue 71, and not just because I was in it (The Mighty Bogg, SID article). The interview with Peter Molyneux was nothing short of a revelation; to discover that such an industry legend is as human and doubt-ridden as the rest of us was very reassuring! Until I received an email about an interview for the SID article I must admit **Retro Gamer** had largely escaped my radar, but I'll definitely be checking it out now. I was surprised to see myself featured alongside some real C64 musical heavyweights, but

BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles

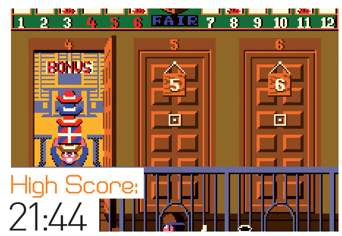


DARRAN

CHOSEN GAME: BANK PANIC

Why I picked it: It's a great game that requires a good eye.

Handy advice: Time your shots carefully. An itchy trigger finger always ends in tears.



High Score: 21:44



CRAIG

CHOSEN GAME: KIKSTART II (COURSE C)

Why I picked it: Because after all these years, *Kikstart II*'s still the best two quid I ever spent on a game.

Handy advice: Go flat out apart from the brick ramp. Your timing will determine your result.



High Score: 715,268

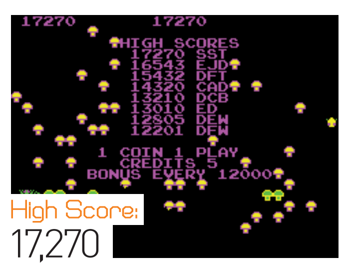


STUART

CHOSEN GAME: CENTIPEDE

Why I picked it: It was one of my all-time favourite arcade games.

Handy advice: Don't be in a rush to destroy the mushrooms; shape them into channels for the centipede to cascade down.



High Score: 17,270

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite joystick?

jdanddiet The Quickshot II. Not the best technically, but it looked fantastic.

Fred83 The Zipstick. All that waggling you had to do just couldn't break it.

CraigGrannell The best stick I ever owned was the clear Competition Pro 5000. The Competition Pro Plus/Zipstick was also fantastic, and I now use those with the Mac and a Stelladaptor. I recall the Powerplay Cruiser also being pretty good at the time. The Arcade – it was a bit like a one-button Competition Pro – was also excellent.

fredghostmaster The one that came with the Atari VCS. Short stick, one red button, sorted!

pottyboy The Zipstick is easily my favourite! A comfortable and clicky two-button joystick that was built to not break whenever you had to get a criminal to confess in the Amiga version of *APB*. The autofire switch and suction cups were handy too.

rossi46 The Bug joystick has been my favourite across multiple platforms. I love how the small micro-switched stick allowed for very precise control in certain games like *Gods*, *Golden Axe* and *Gloom*. After using this amazing joystick, other seemed clumsy and clunky by comparison.

Morkin I can only ever remember using a Cheetah 125 with my Spectrum, so I'll plump for that one.

SirClive The Atari joystick was perfect for *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*. Just hold the base in one hand, put your other palm flat on the top of the stick and oscillate wildly!

My fave, though, was the Competition Pro. Unfortunately the new USB ones just don't cut the mustard most of the time now, though, due to button placement, but for single-button games they are damn fine.

HalcyonDaze00 Competition Pro 5000, brilliant for any game and hard as nails!

TMR It has to be the Zipstick. It was close to impossible to destroy and wonderfully responsive. I used to play *Space Harrier* on the 32X, starting the game with a pad because it needed the start button, then swapping the controller connection out before the "Get Ready" prompt was finished!

Mayhem A toss-up between the Competition Pro and the Powerplay Cruiser. Both were sturdy, excellent, well-made joysticks that have lasted me more than 20 years in total. The latter might just edge it due to the torque setting to make it easier to waggle in certain games!

harlegu1n If arcade sticks are to be included, my trusty SE MadCatz Fighting Stick would be it.

r0jaws The Sega Mega Drive Arcade Power Stick for me.

Hooked up to my Amiga, It's solid and reliable and you can really go to town on the buttons without having to worry about it! It's my favoured bulbous-topped control interface.

felgekarp The Competition Pro was a really good stick and the later Atari sticks – the one with the buttons on each side – was another favourite, but just for sheer awesomeness you can't beat the Quickshot V.

necronom The Zipstick. I still have my original two, and I still use one quite a lot to play single-button retro games (mainly C64, Amiga, and Spectrum).

the_Hawk The Konix Speed King, with satisfying little clicky micro switches. Perfect for those pixel-perfect jumps needed for so many 8-bit platformers. In fact I really, really want one again!

Sir Arthur I had the Quickshot Python for the Amiga. That rapid fire came in very handy when playing *Xenon 2*.

Opa-Opa Konix Speed King for me also – nice bit of kit that sorted the men from the boys.

Jet Pilot I never liked the feel of home joysticks – they could never replicate the arcade feel. The ultimate home controller for me has always been the SNES pad. It combines form and functionality into the best controller ever designed.

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

VIRTUA FIGHTER

Mr Vengeance I've pretty much got the whole lot now myself, and was wondering which *VF* is generally regarded as the best.

ShadowMan Although I haven't really played either as much as I should have, it would be a close call between *VF4 Evo* and *VF5*. *VF2* and *3* don't feel as accessible as the later ones.

speedlolita *VF5* is definitely my favourite. I'm not so keen on the series as a whole, though.

will2097 I really liked the original, and the Saturn conversion was aces. It's also quite a beautiful game with its naked polygons and all.

C=Style I always liked the original and in particular *VF Remix*, which really cleaned up the graphics. It's a very pure fighter.

COLLECTABLES

Fightersmegamix Finding in-game collectables seems to be in everything now. It was fun in the N64 Rare games or to give a bit of replay value to platformers, but it seems that no matter how inappropriate it is you need to collect coins/skulls/recipes/crap to unlock Achievements.

lanky316 Take away the collectables and challenges and some games become exposed. It didn't take long to complete *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, but those riddles kept me and I'm sure plenty of others playing longer than the story did.

The Angry Jock Depends on the game. I've done all the smashes in *Burnout Paradise* but I've maybe done ten pigeons in *GTA IV*. This is maybe because you'll eventually stumble across all smashes but you won't be near all pigeons.

GREAT DESIGNERS

Andykiwi Which game designers do you think deserve more credit?

paranoid marvin Definitely Ron Gilbert, who transformed the point-and-click adventure genre. His subtle humour made *Monkey Island* what it was, which is painfully obvious when you compare the first two to the rest.

TwoHeadedBoy David Perry, from his days at Virgin working on *Aladdin*, *Global Gladiators* and *Cool Spot*, to the whole Shiny Entertainment madness of *Earthworm Jim*, *Messiah*, *Wild 9* and *MDK*.

Romulous Anthony Crowther deserves more exposure, not only for the games he developed on the Commodore platform, but also the fantastic *Realms Of The Haunting*.

Old VS NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which Capcom versus game reigns supreme?

Marvel vs Capcom (Arcade)



Tatsunoko vs Capcom (Wii)



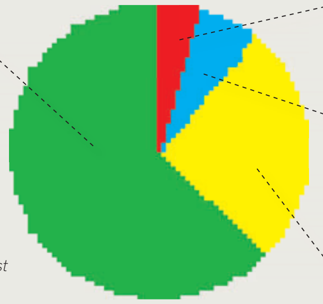
55% | 45%

lexiomiguel While *TVC*'s gameplay is more balanced, *MVC* just wins out because of the great characters

Matt_B I guess this boils down to Tatsunoko vs Marvel, and I'll go with the former any day.

HOT TOPIC

Best David Braben Game?



Elite – **63%**

Virus – **4%**

Zarch – **7%**

Frontier: Elite II – **26%**

Frontier: First Encounters – **0%**

"Being a C16 owner during the 8-bit era, I never got to play *Elite*, so *Frontier* for me" **– clarance**

"*Elite* is a groundbreaking classic. It's difficult to forgive the fact that he has never returned to the genre. For years the fan community were crying out for a fixed and finished version of *FFE* with upgraded graphics." **– killermike**

CONTACT US **Snail Mail:** Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ **Email:** retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

very flattered, so all is good. A big thumbs-up to Craig for an excellent article, and to everyone at the magazine in general.

Kindest regards,

Graham Marsh

Good to hear you enjoyed the article, Graham. It proved to be a very popular feature. So much so, in fact, that we may revisit another aspect of the C64's SID chip in the very near future…

AN APPLE A DAY

Dear Retro Gamer,

Your magazine is the best thing since sliced bread. Having been brought up on the Apple II and being lucky enough to play a great many systems since, it has allowed me to relive many games and brings a bit of joy to an otherwise dissolute, tragic and impoverished existence. My question, though, is this: Will you ever do a special on Apple games or at least contemplate it in future? In my opinion it had some all-time classics on it and in many cases its versions were superior to the other formats that were available at the time. So what do you reckon? How about covering the likes of *Chivalry*, *Aztec* and *Transylvania* sometime in the future?

Cheers and thanks again for the mag. I need my monthly fix or I will die.

Rob, Melbourne, Australia

Worry not, Rob. We're well aware that there hasn't been much Apple II coverage in the magazine and this is something we're looking at rectifying. As soon as we find someone with the credentials to do it justice we'll get on it straight away.

MAD DOG McCREE RULES

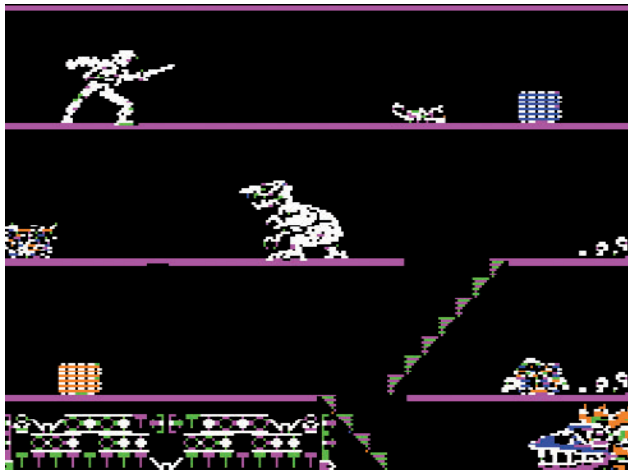
Dear Retro Gamer,

I have recently discovered that I have a guilty secret: I'm actually enjoying *Mad Dog McCree: Gunslinger Pack* on the Wii. Yes, I know there were better lightgun games around at the time, *Lethal Enforcers* and *Virtua Cop* being two for a start, but there's just something about the games that I can't believe I am finding fun. Maybe it's that the acting is so campy and bad that it falls into the 'so bad it's good' category, or maybe it's because most of the actors look like they have a few special interest, exotic films on their CVs, but I'm really enjoying it. The scary thing is that I'm actually wondering if Majesco is planning to release another similar compilation in the near future. In other news, what happened to the planned DS remake of *Double Dragon* that you reported on many years ago? Did it ever come out?

I have every issue and am looking forward to the next one.

Mark Hogg, Derby

We've not heard anything from Majesco about either *Dragon's Lair* or future Wii lightgun games, but it has released *Fast Draw Showdown* on WiiWare, so why not give that a whirl?



» [BBC] Want more games like *Aztec* to appear in the mag? Then be sure to let us know.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

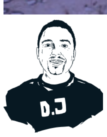
Stu's Internet

Being the up-to-date guy that he is, Stuart has finally got around to having the internet installed in his house. This has resulted in a fair bit of teasing from Steve and Darran, but also meant that everyone has been able to have some cracking good games of *Aliens vs Predator* and *Marvel vs Capcom 2* on Xbox Live. Stuart now spends his evening downloading trial games from Live Arcade and starting conversations that we already had two years earlier.

> "The Apple II had some all-time classics, and in many cases its versions were superior to other formats"

CURRENTLY PLAYING





DARRAN

Borderlands

I've no idea how much time I've sunk into it, but I was finally able to complete *Borderlands*. The only problem I have now is do I start again or go back to the life-swallower that is *Monster Hunter Freedom Unite*?

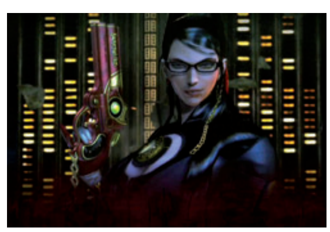




CRAIG

Trace

It might look like a game that's emerged, slightly startled, from the margins of a six-year-old's school exercise book, but *Trace* for the iPhone is a lovely little platform game that's full of innovation.





STUART

Bayonetta

There's nothing not to like about Platinum Games awe-inspiring hack-and-slash epic, which is nothing particularly revolutionary but looks and feels so wonderfully polished that it's one of the best examples of its genre.

retro GAMER

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Cover Image
©Capcom

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☎ (Overseas) +44 1795 592 872
13 issue subscription UK – £51.90
13 issue subscription Europe – £70
13 issue subscription ROW – £80

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Printed by St Ives Plymouth Ltd, Eastern Wood Road, Langage Industrial Estate, Plympton, Plymouth, PL7 5ET
☎ 01752 345411

Distributed in the UK & Eire by: Seymour Distribution, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London, EC1A 9PT
☎ 020 7429 4000

Distributed in Australia by: Gordon & Gotch, Equinox Centre, 18 Rodborough Road, Frenchs Forest, NSW 2086
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Distributed in the Rest of the World by: Marketforce, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London, SE1 0SU
☎ 0203 148 8105

ISSN 1742-3155

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Let's race some Micro Machines!



We go behind the scenes of Codemasters' amazing top-down multiplayer racer

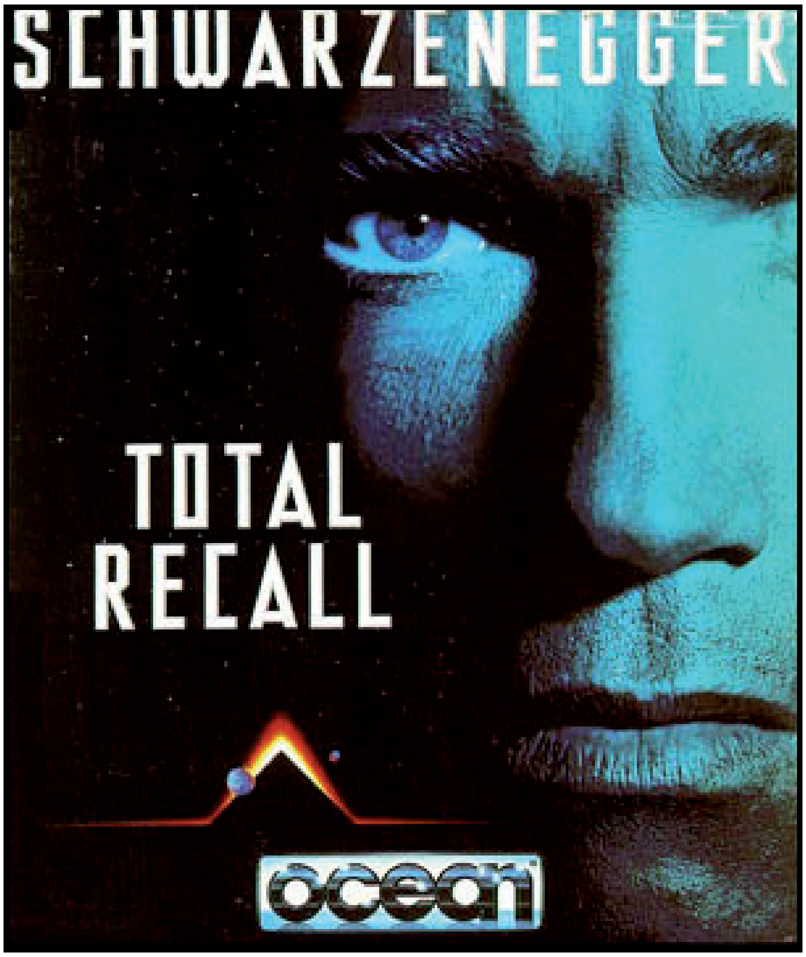
Other exciting features:

- Discover the full story behind the original *Perfect Dark* and Joanna's high-def return on Xbox Live Arcade
- He's worked on *Wolfenstein 3D*, *Doom* and *Quake*, but how much do you really know about John Romero?
- Discover how Atari's coin-op division created its amazing apocalyptic 1987 racer *RoadBlasters*

LOAD 75

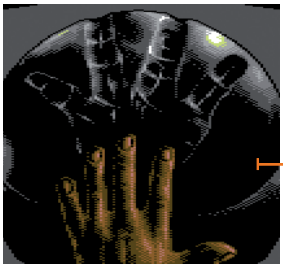
NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 31 MARCH 2010



TOTAL RECALL

Paul Verhoeven's sci-fi epic about shady memory transplanting corporations, terraforming on Mars and Arnold Schwarzenegger losing his mind and then finding it again, was given the side-scrolling action beat-'em-up treatment by Ocean. You might know how the movie ends, but the game ending is far better…



SCREEN 1
Quaid makes his way to a mysterious alien hand dryer that was recovered from the planet's rocky stomach during an excavation a few Thursdays ago.



SCREEN 2
Quaid places his hand into the drying device and it springs into action. He might be about to die in huge pain, but at least his hands won't be clammy.



SCREEN 3
But it didn't just dry his hand; it cooked it to a crisp. Never trust alien equipment. Quaid's charred extremities look awfully cracked and rough.



SCREEN 4
Thankfully, the whole cataclysm is averted. This gives Quaid ample time to consult a dermatologist about his hand; this is the doc's reaction upon seeing it.



SCREEN 5
Mars is finally terraformed and Quaid is fit enough to venture out into this brave new world and date superficial women again. The end.